EVERY WEEK

JAN. 27, 1923

Western Story Magazine

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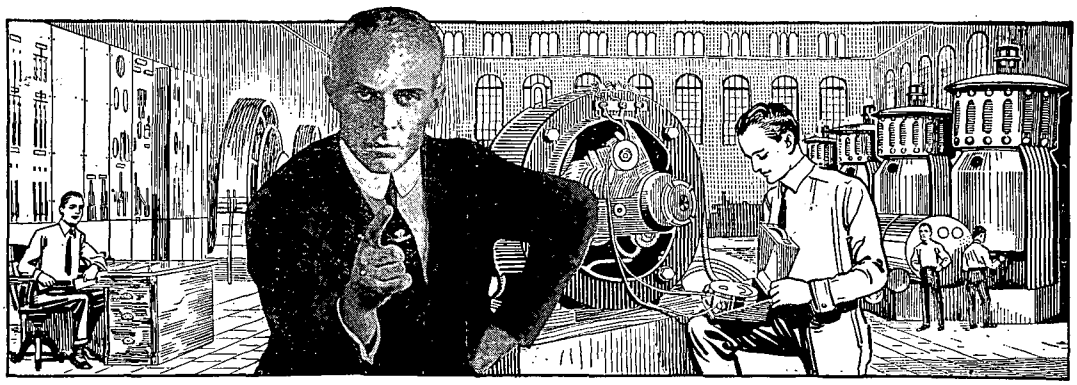

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Western Story Magazine

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Vol. XXXII Contents for January 27, 1923 No. 1

TEN STORIES IN THIS ISSUE

ONE COMPLETE NOVEL

Under His Shirt . . . . *Max Brand* . . . 3

TWO SERIALS

Three Sons from Bar O X . . *George Gilbert* . . 58
A Seven-part Story—Part Two
Hill-bred Barton's Code . . . *Charles Wesley Sanders* . 98
A Five-part Story—Part Three

SIX SHORT STORIES

A Horse Who Didn't Forget . . *Harrison Conrard* . . 38
Holdup Men Have Families, Too . *Hugh F. Grinstead* . . 46
The Cold Deck Sweepstakes . . *Frank Richardson Pierce* . 51
Mispickel . . . . . *Reginald C. Barker* . . 82
Top Hand or Nothing . . . *Harley P. Lathrop* . . 87
Romanced to Freedom . . . *Murray Leinster* . . 119
The Call of the Trail (Poem) . . *Reginald C. Barker* . . 128

ONE SPECIAL ARTICLE

Indian Blankets . . . . . *E. Clark Richards* . . 125

MISCELLANEOUS

Stones Are of Practical Use to the Fruit Grower 37
The Cattalo, a New Type of Animal . . 50
A California Hermit 57
Large Coal Deposits Opened in Wyoming . 127
Nitrates in Southeastern California . . 130
Nevada Has a Mountain of Tooth Powder . 132
A Trapper of the Cascades . . . 135
New River Discovered in the Siskiyous . 141

DEPARTMENTS

The Round-up . . . . . *The Editor* . . . 129
Swapper's Exchange 131
Where to Go and How to Get There . *John North* . . . 133
The Hollow Tree . . . . *Louise Rice* . . . 136
Advice to Photographers . . . *Clyde C. Belknap* . . 139
Missing 142

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IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE:

In and About Lone Dog

Lone Dog! The very name signifies isolation. In this story it is the isolation of the desert, and the desert always spells adventure or tragedy. In this story you will get something of both, and the result is a powerful story of the elemental emotions against a background of Western wilds and wastes.

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Western Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

Vol. XXXII JANUARY 27, 1923 No. 1

Under His Shirt

By Max Brand

Author of the "Jim Curry" Stories, etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE BREASTPLATE.

IT was a battered rectangle of steel with the corners chipped off. Undoubtedly it had been enameled, but the enameled surface had been covered with a scroll work, and the uncounted generations in their passing had left it with a strange, half-molded appearance. Underneath it was a placard which read: "A Bullet-proof Breastplate of Finest Steel."

Joe Daly passed on to the next object, a stack of murderous halberds and cruel-headed spears, but his eyes were cloyed with seeing, and he closed them. Far away beyond the walls of the museum he heard the murmur of the traffic of New York. He had not been able to escape from that sound since he arrived in Manhattan, and his only true happiness came to him at night in sleep; when he dreamed of the mountain silences which he had left.

He opened his eyes again, and the oppressive load of ancient armor sickened him. The more he saw the more bitterly he longed to be back there, to be out of this thick air, this stifling heat, and in exchange to feel the clean and honest burning of the Western sun!

"Taslet, Chased In Gold. Part of Gold-wrought Suit of Armor Probably Belonging To——" He turned away, shaking his head, and went back to the doors of the great museum and stared

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out into the street. But when he saw the scurrying drift of automobiles and buses which roared up Fifth Avenue, his heart sank again. Better this retired gloom of the distant ages and their relics, better the strange-smelling atmosphere of the museum and its sense of death than to mingle in a crowd of which he was not a part. A lump grew in his throat. He set his teeth to keep the tears out of his eyes. Self-pity was beginning to unnerve him.

But when he thought of going back to that West for which he yearned, the compelling fear of death stepped in between and warned him back. He saw again the squat and ungraceful form of Pete Burnside, with the long arms hanging at his side. He heard the voice of Pete ringing at his very ear, with a threat of dire things that would happen if he ever came back.

For six mortal months he had remained away. If he returned he must face Pete Burnside. If he wished to be able to hold up his head among his own gang of chosen reprobates, with whom he had plundered society for three years, he must face Pete Burnside, the deputy sheriff who had crushed him.

He touched his shoulder and winced. The wound had long since healed. It was not the memory of the pain which troubled him; it was the recollection of the magic by which Burnside had conjured his revolver out of its holster—the terrible and uncanny speed with which he had produced and leveled his weapon. How it had been done, Joe Daly could not understand. But he was at least sure that it would never be in his power to rival that speed and accuracy. So far as he was concerned, Burnside was sure death. As long as he was susceptible to wounds——"

Here his thoughts came to a sudden and jarring halt. For there had risen in his mind another vision of what he had seen but a few moments before: "Bullet-proof Breastplate of Finest Steel."

"Bullet-proof breastplate!"

And then the fire died out of his eyes. He snapped his fingers and shrugged his shoulders in disgust. Of course this bit of old armor had been bullet proof only in the days when unrifled muskets had belched forth great, blunt bullets, which would thud against armor more like putty out of a sling than a bullet carrying death in its touch.

However he went back to look at it again. It had become fascinating, and he was profoundly grateful, now that the great chamber in which it hung was practically deserted. That loneliness had been driving him distracted a short time before, but now it was a blessing.

Was he alone? He began to perceive a hundred muted little whispers and stifled voices. And yonder was an old. old man, with white hair flowing down to his shoulders. He was bent over before a glass case, either copying inscriptions on the armor exposed there, or else writing a detailed description.

Joe Daly scowled and stepped closer to the plate of armor and touched it between thumb and forefinger. Then a thrill went crawling up his spine and into his vitals. For the steel was thick—very thick! There was a padding of time-eaten velvet on the back of it, but even without the velvet the steel was very thick.

Now, with a heart thumping in his breast, he turned carelessly away and traversed the gallery in some haste. At the farther end he turned and began to retrace his way with even greater speed, pausing now and then for a last sight of particular relics here and there. When he arrived at the breastplate he did not even look around him, on the theory that there is nothing which calls attention so quickly as the furtive glance of a guilty eye. He picked the breastplate from its peg and dropped it inside

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his coat, so that the lower part of it touched the upper band of his trousers and was supported there. Then he went on again, with his hands in his pockets, and his thumbs raised to support the weight of the steel.

He had not dreamed that the stuff could be so ponderous. If a little specimen such as this weighed so much, how could a poor devil entirely encased in metal have navigated—how could he ever have got upon a horse, unless a friendly derrick and windlass were used to hoist him?

At the thought Joe Daly smiled and continued down the gallery. Not that he left directly, or in haste. No, he paused from time to time, still examining curiosities. When he reached the farther end he saw a uniformed attendant stride up to the place from which he had taken the breastplate

Joe waited for no more. He did not pause to learn if the guard had discovered the theft. Instead, one long leap to the side carried him away from the aisle and into a side turning. Here he hastened on briskly. Some one was calling in the great gallery behind him; and he heard the noise of running feet. Joe, turning to the left and then to the right, was presently lost in a maze from which he issued out into the first and main hall of the museum.

It seemed an interminable space to the revolving doors. Presently he stood outside at the head of the long flight of steps. Now he hurried down and stood on the pavement. There were taxicabs near by. But in the magazine which had diverted him the night before, he had read how criminals are often traced by the taxicabs in which they had ridden. Such a fate should not fall to Joe Daly.

Quickly he turned and started briskly down the avenue, climbed onto a plebian bus at the next stop, and presently was rocking along on the way downtown to his hotel. In spite of himself he could not help but glance back over his shoulder and down the street. He saw, from time to time, half a dozen automobiles, recklessly violating the speed laws and nosing swiftly through the traffic. Any one of these might be filled with the uniformed men from the museum. How many such men—stuffy and antiquated figures—would be required to capture Joe Daly?

He pondered that question with some pride and a stiffening of his lower jaw. In due time he was back at the hotel. Instantly he snatched the breastplate from beneath his coat and flung it on the bed. It was a thick slab, to be sure, and if it were of a particular quality—— He did not pursue this thought. The plate must be tested. There was a loud explosion in the street—a back fire. That gave him his next idea. Instantly he propped the breastplate against the wall on the farther side of the room, with a well-wadded pillow behind it. A breastplate on a human body would not proffer the rigid resistance of a wall. Then he took his stand near the window, so that the sound would not echo through the house, but pass freely into the open air. He drew the revolver which was always with him, leveled it quickly, and fired.

The breastplate shuddered and drew back, as the great forty-five slug struck home. It was a snap shot, but beautifully planted. It had landed in the exact center of the armor. Now he ran forward to see the results of the shot, quivering with anticipation. This was the great moment!

Behold, when he raised the armor, a cruel abrasion in the surface exactly in the center, but the hole did not cut clear through. There was still a solid sheet of steel behind.

Hastily he concealed gun and breastplate, but no one came with inquiries. No doubt those who were near and heard thought it simply another back fire in the street.

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"What a cinch," said Joe Daly, "to bump off a gent in this here town and get away with it!"

CHAPTER II.

PETE RIDES TO BATTLE.

WHEN the news of Joe Daly's return was first carried to Pete Burnside, the deputy sheriff did not believe it. And there were good reasons for his incredulity. Through a long life of battle on the Western frontier, he was well-acquainted with what happens to the heart and soul of a man who is once beaten in fight. After the shameful and conclusive beating which Joe Daly had sustained seven months before, Pete Burnside would have sworn that the latter could never return and hold up his head among his old companions.

To be sure, Pete Burnside knew that there are some men who can be beaten in battle, shot down in the midst of the fight by a fair foe, and then arise at a later time and crush the once-victorious enemy. These are phlegmatic fighters—English warriors, so to speak. But there is another kind, the kind to which Joe Daly belonged. These are men whose muscles are set upon hair-trigger nerves. Their movements in a crisis become blindingly swift. The draw of their gun is like the uncurling of the lash when the whip is snapped. In a tenth part of a second, a single terrible explosion of mental and nervous energy, the bullet is fired, the enemy is dropped, the battle is over. Or, if it is maintained, the battle while it lasts is simply a prolongation of that original conflict.

But when such a man is beaten to the draw, he is very apt to lose his nerve. After one defeat he is no account. Joe Daly, as Pete knew, was one of that high-strung type. And the reason that Pete knew so well was because he was himself in the very same category

He knew that he himself conquered in the same spirit in which Daly fought. There was that resistless union of hysteria of nerves and muscles working together in great flashes of effort. His life, it might be said, was composed of a scattered series of such flashes of effort. Daly's was compased of the same thing. The chief difference was the use to which they put their abilities to paralyze the efforts of ordinary men. Daly was, as Burnside was practically confident, the leading member of a gang which rustled cattle and in other ways defied the law. But Burnside was a deputy sheriff.

So well known were Burnside's ability with a gun and his dauntless courage in the pursuit and destruction of outlaws, that he might have been sheriff in half a dozen counties. But he preferred to hold a more or less roving commission, going here and going there, striking at random, as the occasion moved him, and always acting as an invaluable coadjutor of the law.

Burnside had trailed Joe Daly and his gang until Burnside was on the verge of cornering half a dozen of them. On that occasion Joe himself had turned back to face and destroy the destroyer. And in that memorable encounter Joe had gone down. The bullet of Burnside had crashed through the shoulder of Joe just a fraction of a second before Joe's own gun had exploded and sent a slug whistling past the head of the deputy sheriff.

But, no matter how close a call it had been, there was never a truer maxim than that a miss is as good as a mile. The burden of victory rested with Pete. He lifted the fallen enemy and carried him to town. On the way he assured Joe that the time had come when Joe must hunt for better camping grounds, and if he returned in that direction, after his recovery, he, Pete Burnside, would make it his duty and his pleasure to call upon him and blow him off the

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face of the earth. For Pete Burnside was well convinced that Joe was a rustler of cattle, a horse thief, and other things unspeakable. He would never forget the peculiar expression of horror with which Joe had looked up into his face on that day. And in that instant he had known that Daly would never dare to face him again.

He knew that by consulting his own inner man. And, concerning himself, he was calmly confident that no human being could ever beat him if the chances to draw were equal at the start. If they were not, that was another story, and defeat would be no disgrace—would mean nothing except death, perhaps, and death was meaningless compared to the glory of being the greatest and most dreaded man hunter in the mountain ranges. In the meantime he believed that it was impossible for any other human being to possess that flashing speed with a gun and that deadly certainty in action with which he was blessed—a blessing which he cultivated and improved by constant practice. But if the impossible should ever happen—if another should surpass him in speed and precision—what would happen to that perilously finely organized nervous system?

At the thought he shuddered and felt his pride disintegrate. He could feel himself crumble at the prospect. He would sink as low as he had once been high!

Such was the thought of Pete Burnside. And, knowing what he did, it was no wonder that he blinked and then shook his head when it was told to him that Joe Daly was back in town, more insolent than ever and clamorously announcing that he was ready to meet the terrible deputy sheriff whenever that worthy desired a meeting.

The sheriff himself was worried. He could not send for Pete, because there was no charge against Joe. There was only a huge weight of suspicion. Legally speaking the deputy had not had the slightest shadow of a right to command Joe Daly to leave those parts and never to return. But in the eye of the public at large, Pete had every right. And it had been noticed that after the disappearance of Joe Daly the rustling of cattle, the stealing of horses, the occasional holdups through the adjacent hills fell away to nothingness, comparatively speaking.

What could be a more vivid proof that Pete Burnside, as usual, had been right and had solved the problem for the community. They would have voted him a whole flock of gold watches and chains and huge diamond pins. But gifts were not wanted. Pete lived for the pleasure of battle, and he did not wish to be paid for doing his duty. His salary, he often said, represented living expenses, not a reward for service!

And when the distinguished deputy heard that Joe Daly was returned to the town, he shrugged his shoulders, removed his cigarette from his lips, and blew a cloud of smoke at the moon.

"There's sure queer things happening around these parts," said Pete Burnside and straightway mounted his horse and started for the town.

It was just after twilight when he started. It was eight o'clock when his horse jogged down the main street knocking up a cloud of alkali dust which stung the nostrils of the riders. He knew where to go, but he did not know what he should expect to meet. Strange doubts had been rising in his mind, and he had pushed on his horse until the poor creature was almost exhausted in his eagerness to get at once to his enemy and settle all doubts with the guns. But what had nerved Joe Daly to return?

A chill of terror struck through the deputy sheriff. It was not fear of Joe, to be sure, but it was fear of some power which might be behind Daly. It was fear of fear, one might have said.

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Something had happened not to the body of Daly, of course, but to his spirit. Something which must have been like a miracle, for he could vividly remember how Daly had cringed before him on the occasion of their last meeting.

Where he would find Joe now was not a matter of question. Daly would be on the hotel veranda. At the coming of the deputy he would rise. They would exchange words, so that both could be said to have received their warning, and then they would go for their weapons of one accord. He who died would be buried. He who survived might be arrested, but in that case he would plead that he saw the hand of his opponent go toward the holster at his side, and that he had shot in self-defense. And not the most prejudiced jury that could be brought together in the mountains would convict where there was a reasonable doubt about that plea of self-defense. For, as the good citizens told themselves and one another, how could they tell when they themselves might be in such an encounter? When they were about to fight for their lives, would they wish to know that the law would hang them, should they happen to escape from the bullets of the enemy?

Straight up to the hotel, then, rode Pete Burnside. How would Joe Daly appear, and what would be his manner? The deputy saw even from a great distance; even from a great distance he heard a ringing and loud laughter. And when he came a little closer he saw Joe Daly tilted far back in a chair on the veranda, with his thumbs hooked into the armholes of his vest, and his hat thrust to the back of his head. And his ugly, square-face was wreathed with grins of confidence and self-satisfaction.

The deputy hesitated a single instant. Then he gritted his teeth and made the nervousness leave him. He swung to the ground and advanced. There was a gripping chill in his stomach, and his head was light and empty; his lips trembled, his knees were unstrung; his face was white. Now a great coldness of spirit was translated into a physical chill.

It was fear. But, for that matter, he never entered a battle without being in the hold of this same terror. He fought it away and forced himself up the steps to the upper level of the veranda. This, after all, was the great joy of the battle—to feel himself on the verge of collapse through terror, to fight away that weakness, to summon all his faculties for the great effort, to whip out the gun at the opportune moment, to dash the enemy to the ground with his flying bullet—this was a joy compared with which all else was as nothing. The gaming table had no fascination for one who had taken the chances of life and death in his hand.

Suddenly he stood in the full blaze of the big lamp which lighted the veranda. Joe Daly, he noted, had chosen a distant and obscure corner, where the light fell only with half the radiance that shone upon Pete at the head of the steps. But let Joe have that handicap in his favor. He, Pete Burnside, had ever been willing to take the worse portion in the battle. It made the glory of victory all the sweeter.

As he appeared, Daly sprang to his feet.

"Is that mean four-flusher and lying hound that's been spreading talk about me around these parts?" asked Daly. "Is that you, Pete Burnside?"

Pete pushed back his hat, then remembered that he must not expose the utter pallor of his face. Now he jerked his sombrero lower, so that its shadow might protect him from the prying eyes of Daly.

"I allow it's me, all right," he said. "I been hearing that you want to see me, Joe."

"I ain't said a word like that. I just

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sent out to say that I'm back in town. Does that mean anything to you?"

He was working himself into his battle fury, but Pete Burnside hesitated. He had not yet evoked that coldly hostile frame of mind which he liked best before he struck. The fear had been pushed to the back of his mind, but it was still present.

"I ain't going to say 'Welcome home,' if that's what you expect, Joe."

"You know very well what I'm driving at. When I got out of town you said that you'd come with your gun ready and shoot me full of holes, if I came back. Well, here I am, Pete. And how come that your gat is in the leather still, eh?"

There was no chance to wait after such a direct insult. Pete Burnside reached for his gun. Daly had not waited; no sooner had he hurled his defiance than he jerked out his Colt. And yet the deputy, watching the movements of his antagonist, knew that he had the result of the battle in the hollow of his hand. He could still delay for a thousandth part of a second the convulsive move which would stretch Joe Daly bleeding and dying on the boards of the veranda.

But now was the time. The gun of Daly was clear of the holster. All men must admit, afterward, that he had allowed Daly to have the advantage in the start of the draw. Then he made his own motion. It was an explosion of mind and muscle. The gun was literally thought out of its holster, the heavy butt of the Colt struck the palm of his hand, and he fired. It was a clean death to his credit. For that bullet struck straight over the heart of Daly. There could be no doubt about it. Pete saw Daly stagger under the blow, he could have sworn, and yet Joe did not go down! No, amazing though it seemed, Joe Daly stood! And, before Burnside could fire again, Joe's gun exploded. There was an ocean of darkness poured over the spirit of Pete Burnside, and he pitched forward upon his face.

CHAPTER III.

"RED" STANTON.

NO man ever performed in six months a journey as long as the journey which Pete Burnside completed. Men had girdled the globe many times in such a space of months, but Pete Burnside passed from courageous manhood to cowardly and slinking meanness of spirit. He was completely gone. There was nothing left to him.

If it had been a shot fired at a longer range, or if he had shot with a trifle less surety, it might have been well enough for him. But he had seen the bullet drive home, he could have sworn. And having seen that, and, also, how Daly failed to fall, it was all over with Pete.

He himself had been the first to realize it. He had heard other beaten men tell with pitiful eagerness and certainty how they had really won—how their bullets had landed—and how only a miracle had saved the other fellow and enabled him, instead of falling, to strike down the other man instead.

The bullet had struck Daly in the middle of the breast, or a little to the left. And Daly should have died. Instead he had staggered and dropped his man, the bullet grazing Pete's head. Indeed, he was even wrong about the staggering. For it appeared afterward that Daly had been absolutely uninjured, and he had walked away from the spot, whistling, a moment later!

It haunted Pete and pursued him like a living thing, the horror of that moment. And his spirit began to crumble and decay, just as he had known it would do in such a case. Finally, when he was healed of the wound which he had received, there came the show-down which he had dreaded.

A big cow-puncher went wild with

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moonshine whisky one evening, and Pete was summoned to quell the disturbance. He went with dragging feet to perform the task. He faced the big man and ordered him out of the room. And, instead of going, the puncher had reached for a gun. After that, Pete tried not to remember. For when he thought of it, perspiration rushed out on his forehead, and a wave of sickness poured through him.

But Pete knew that, when the big cow-puncher, Stanton, came at him, and he had tried to get out his own gun, his fingers had been paralyzed, and he had heard the weapon of Stanton explode. The bullet flew wild. The puncher was too drunk to hit the side of a barn at ten paces. But all the strength had run out of Pete's body, and his knees sagged. He cowered in a corner and begged Stanton to let him live!

That had been the nightmare as it actually happened. One thought of it was enough to turn the former deputy to a ghastly gray-green. And most of all he remembered the sick faces of the men who had come to him and raised him and, with voices full of scorn and disgust and pity, bade him go back to his bed, because he still must be sicker than the doctor knew.

And that night he had sneaked out of the town and never went back. He carried with him what possessions he could take conveniently, but he dared not stay to sell what else belonged to him. He dared not meet other men and face their scorn.

First of all he fled straight south. He went as far as San Antonio. Here he lived for a month and established a new circle of friends. Just as he began to make a name for himself, a man came in one day from the north, saw him, recognized him, and told the story. Pete Burnside fled from San Antonio by night, with horror of himself choking him. Then he dipped into Mexico, but it made no difference. Wherever he went, there were men who had seen him in his old home town, men who had watched that awful scene of degradation.

There were two paths open to him. Either he must put an end to his respectable life with a bullet, or else he must put an end to that life by sinking out of sight of all his fellows.

He made the latter choice and became a vagrant. In four months he drifted to the four corners of the country. He saw Vancouver one week and Los Angeles the next. He wandered to New Orleans and thence to New York and from New York to Quebec. But eventually the pull of home will draw men back, as surely as the old instinct guides the carrier pigeon.

Pete dropped off a train in the mountain desert, a scant two hundred miles from his home town. He had left the train just outside a small village, and near the place where he had left it he found a gulley covered with low scrub and brush and with a small stream trickling through it. It was an ideal place for a "jungle," and he began searching through for the assemblage place.

He had not been wrong. He came upon a clearing on the flattened shoulder of a hill. In the midst were half a dozen men in various stages of raggedness and now busily at work on the preparation of a great stew. The huge washboiler, which some hobo of another generation had stolen from the village and presented to the jungle—black with a hundred coats of soot on the outside—was a perfectly satisfactory dish to contain enough stew to supply the appetites of twenty voracious eaters. And there is not in the world a set of gourmands equal to the great American hobo. He has a hump like the camel. He has to live a week on nothing, and he makes up for seven days of starvation in one heaven-astounding attack on victuals.

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Pete, being broke, sniffed the preparations from afar. Then, as he drew closer, he was asked if he had money to "pony up" for his share. He admitted that he was broke, but he offered to buy his share with some newly purloined cigars. The cigars made the mouth of more than one tramp water, but they were obdurate. If he had not money, the rule was that he must procure his share of the edibles.

So he turned back toward the town, a mile and a half away. It was dusk when he reached it, and in the dusk he slipped quietly into a hen roost, removed a fat hen from her perch, and with that prize stole back to the charmed circle around the fire.

He was greeted with acclamation. For the meat end of that mulligan was not altogether satisfactory. They had gathered enough potatoes and some cans of corn and tomatoes. They had secured greens. Some one was frying bread over a little adjacent fire. And at another blaze a great can was half filled with seething coffee. There were some bits of pork and a few pounds of beef in the stew, but the chicken was a blessing sent straight from heaven.

There was a breathlessly short interval spent in cleaning and plucking that fat hen. Then it was tossed in to join the rest of the stew. And the hoboes sat back to regard the steaming result of their united thefts. They contemplated one another, too, not with direct and insolent stares—for there is no courtesy so consummate in some respects as the courtesy of derelicts—but with secret and furtive glances. They estimated one another with the greatest cunning.

Pete Burnside, as usual, was wretched so long as he was forced to be in the company of his fellow men. For one among them, even among these tramps, was liable to know what he had been, and how he had fallen. Nay, worse than that, of late he had sunk so low that men had begun to get at the craven truth about him by simply using their observation.

However it seemed that the half dozen worthies whom he had joined on this occasion, were a great deal less formidable than the majority of those whom he had met on his unending pilgrimage. They were all rather old. That is to say, they were past fifty. And when a man on the road reaches the age of fifty, his joints are stiff, his eye is failing, his back begins to stoop. He had crammed too many years into a short space, and he begins to pay up his penalties.

Among such as these, Pete felt himself to be certainly secure. He began to stir around with a slight air of authority, such as might be forgiven in one who had brought in the choicest portion of the evening meal. He fetched some more wood and stood over the fire and fed it with fresh pieces. He looked into the dark and simmering mass of the stew and sniffed its contents—the dozen blending odors which made it so pleasantly attractive. Altogether he bustled about as one who has a little authority and who is anxious to make it appear more.

Not one of them needed to be told when the moment had arrived to serve the stew. They had risen as of one accord and grouped themselves about the caldron. In a moment more the first huge helpings had been ladled forth. And now they sat around in a loose circle and devoured their rations in utter silence. There was only the whispering of the wind and the loud snapping of the fire.

So intent were they on their feast that they suffered themselves to be surprised by the advent of a new arrival.

"Hello-o-oo!" thundered the newcomer. "What sort of gents are you to leave me here starving?"

They looked up in amazement, each crowding an extra bite down his throat

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for fear that he might not taste the remainder of his meal. What they saw was a towering giant, large enough in fact, but made still larger by the manner in which the shadow and firelight shook in turn across him. A great sombrero, half of whose brim had been torn away, was pushed back to expose a densely curling crop of red hair, hair so flamingly red that it might have seemed on fire. He wore a ragged coat so much too small for him that it was apparent one serious exertion would tear it to bits. Around his hips sagged the cow-puncher's cartridge belt, with a Colt in a battered old holster, and he wore on his feet the cow-puncher's riding boots, though there is no known gear so inconvenient for walking. His huge hands, doubled into fists, were now planted on his hips, and he looked down upon the circle of veteran hoboes very much as a man of ordinary stature might have looked down with surprise and amusement and some mischief upon a circle of fairies dancing in a ring.

Pete Burnside looked up to the intruder with a speechless horror, for he saw in the hairy-handed giant no other than that final instrument of his downfall, "Red" Stanton himself!

CHAPTER IV.

THE PLAYFUL GIANT.

YES, it was Red Stanton, sunk at last to the level of a tramp. Indeed he had long been headed in that direction by a love of drink and a detestation for work. He was newly come into the world-old order of vagrants, however, as his cow-puncher attire testified. In another month this would be exchanged for a more comfortable outfit.

The big man looked about him, made sure of his people one by one, and finally rested his steel-blue eyes upon Pete Burnside. He strode straight across the circle. He stood above Pete and, looking down at him, laughed. It was long and loud laughter, and the gorge of Pete rose. Then he dropped his head and submitted. What was the use of resistance? Once before, when he was closer to being a man, he had been beaten by this huge monster of a man. How could he hope to stand before Red, now that he, Pete, had sunk so far into degradation. But the shame which took hold on Pete was less hot and stinging than he had felt a thousand times before. It was at least some mitigation of his misery that those who witnessed his humiliation should be fallen men, though they had not fallen quite as low as he.

Not fallen quite as low as he? He looked around upon those wretched derelicts. He saw their scornful, sneering faces turned toward him. Yes, the worst of these was a better man than he. The worst of these would have made some feeble resistance of words at least, before he would submit to be laughed at.

Red Stanton turned away and stood at the side of the steaming washboiler.

"I was thinking that I wasn't to eat to-night," he said, "but I see where I'm wrong. You boys got this all fixed up just in time for me. Gimme something to eat with, Burnside. What are you sitting there for? Ain't you been stuffing your stomach all this time while I been starving? Ain't you got the manners to lemme have a spoon?"

So saying, he leaned and snatched from the hand of Pete the spoon with which he had been eating. He dashed this through a pot of water which was steaming close by. He seized upon the side of the boiler.

"Well, boys," he said, "looks to me like there ain't any more than one man-sized meal here."

He flashed his glance of defiance around the circle. And Pete Burnside returned that glance with a curious interest. He was seeing in imagination what he would have done in the old

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days. This loud-mouthed ruffian he would have silenced with a word, and if a word were not sufficient, there would have been the sure speed and accuracy of his gun play to fall back upon. But his gun had been rarely needed in the days of his glory. There had been in his bearing an unconquerable air which imposed upon the most daring. In his eye there had been a straight look which went through and through the heart of a bully and warned him that battle and destruction lay just ahead.

But that day was long since past. His very soul had shriveled in him since the day when he had seen his bullet strike home in the body of Joe Daly—when he could have sworn that he saw Joe stagger in his tracks—and yet Daly had failed to fall! How could a man be sure of anything in such circumstances? The world was in confusion, and the strength of Pete Burnside was sapped at the root.

So Red Stanton reached into the deeps of the pot and brought forth a spoonful of the stew. But at the sight of their food gone to waste on this tyrannical giant, there was a stir of angry feeling in the six tramps. Not a man among those hoboes but had been in his prime a gallant fighter. Many an heroic tale could have been told of their prowess. Now, to be sure, time and hard weather and harder usage had unstrung their muscles and stiffened their joints, but the spirits within them were not altered. They were as keen-edged as ever. They could not attack him in hand-to-hand battle; that was obviously foolish. Their united valor and physical power banded together would not have made enough opposition to give him meager exercise. In those burly hands of his was power enough to have crushed skulls.

Instead of fists they fell back on other weapons. A gray-haired man, stiff, straight—his face red with weather and anger—stood up from the relics of his meal.

"Look here, you double-stomached bull, you can't bust down the fences and get in at our feed like that. Lay off, you!"

Red Stanton looked around at the speaker from behind another heaping spoonful. He grinned, then stowed the contents of the spoon behind a bulging cheek.

"Very good," he said. "That's a good joke! Are you meaning to argufy with me, son?"

"Don't it sound that way?"

"It *sounds* that way, but you look too plumb sensible to be talking fool talk."

"Boys," said the other, "it looks to me like we got to get rid of this baby. Are you going to gimme a hand?"

His doubts were soon set at rest. Each in turn rose and shook himself. Upon their hard features appeared smiles of joy, as when some stiff-legged war horse hears far off the whining of the battle horns and lifts his head from the rocks of his pasture. So they stood up, and each man reached for the weapon which was most to his choice. One man as he got up took a large, ragged stone in either hand and advanced with these formidable weapons. Another pushed himself to his feet by means of a cudgel with a knotted end, a section of a small sapling which had been burned off in the fire. The others caught up sticks and stones, or else produced from their pockets long-bladed knives, quite capable of inviting forth the soul of the strongest man from between his ribs.

As they came on, Red Stanton hurriedly stowed another spoonful of the stew in his cheek and then blundered to his feet. Pete Burnside watched him sharply. Even a veritable hero would have been apt to flee from that assortment of rocks and stones and knives. He had a revolver, to be sure, but the first shot, which might drop one man,

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would be answered with a volley from which he could hardly hope to escape.

Yet Stanton threw out his arms and laughed thunderously in their faces.

"Come on, gents," he said. "I ain't had no exercise but breaking up a couple of shacks to bits to-day. I don't get no pleasure out of food unless I can work for it. Come on, old sons!"

His confidence abashed even their iron hearts, and they paused an instant to permit their only ally to join them. But though Pete dropped his head under their accusing glances, he did not rise from his place. He dared not.

"No good waiting for him, boys," said the giant. "He ain't going to look for no more trouble with me. He knows me, eh?"

Stanton's laugh rolled and boomed across the clearing. It was the last blow. Surely now the fallen spirit of Pete would rise in him. He felt the first hot pricking of anger stir in him. He waited with joy and thankfulness for that wrath to increase to a hot fury, but the cold wave of fear returned and drowned the last embers of his courage. He could only sit there with his head down like a whipped cur and watch the fight in the distance.

There was a snarl of disgust and rage from the six hoboes. Their glances promised annihilation to Pete, should they have leisure to deal with him a little later. Then they swept suddenly forward to the attack, as though they dared not delay, lest the shame which they had just looked upon might unnerve them.

Forward they plunged, and three ragged rocks shot at Red Stanton. Suddenly he began to move with a celerity which amazed Pete. He was amazed for two reasons: the first being that Red apparently had no desire to use his revolver; and the second reason was that the big man was able to weave about as deftly as a football player or a dodging boxer and so avoid the missiles. Another volley could not be entirely avoided. One rock just grazed his head, and he staggered drunkenly. Before he could straighten, and his brain clear, another big rock knocked him back, gasping for breath.

The six saw their advantage and with a wild whoop rushed in to pull down their victim. But Red Stanton, though badly hurt, still had fight in him. He had staggered back until his shoulders struck against the upper rail of an old fence which extended through the trees down to the edge of the water below. Red, with a roar of satisfaction, caught hold on the board which had arrested his fall. He tore it away from the two posts to which it was nailed. He swung the big timber around his head with as much ease as, in another age, a stout English yeoman might have twirled his quarter staff on thumb and finger.

Into the circle of that swaying engine the six hoboes would not have been eager to run, but they had started forward so fast that they could not stop themselves. And the blow crashed upon them, just as they strove to stop. The result was ruin. One went down headlong under the blow, his knife spinning in a bright arc from his hand. Another stumbled, staggered, and fell flat. Two more dropped to their knees, and only one of the six was left standing.

This worthy jumped forward with a yell which was more fright than battle courage. He was met in mid-air, as he sprang in with his knife poised and murder in his eyes, not by a shooting fist, but by a most unromantic weapon. The great boot of Red Stanton swung out and up. His toe and heel landed at the same moment into the breast and stomach of the veteran. There was a gurgling cry from that fellow, and he shot back, struck the earth with a soft thump, and lay flat, as though with a great weight crushing him down.

In the meantime, however, there remained four men ready and unhurt, ca-

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pable of getting to close quarters with the big man. As for the fence rail, that cumbersome weapon had been knocked into splinters at the first blow, for it was more than half rotten. Red Stanton was now empty-handed.

Even in this crisis, however, he did not draw his revolver. Moreover he refused to give ground, and with a roar like the bellow of a wounded bull he plunged forward at the vagrants.

Stanton was too much for them. They had tasted the strength of his hand, and it was more than enough for them. They turned their backs and fled at the top of their speed. Yet all their speed was not enough. Three of them were allowed to get away, but the most rearward laggard, limping as he ran, was caught from behind, and, while his shriek rang through the air, he was whirled and then sent hurtling down the slope toward the water.

It seemed to horrify Pete Burnside that the old man was surely no better than dead. He toppled down the slope, hit the water with a crash, and finally dragged himself slowly out on the farther shore. Red laughed until he staggered and amused himself by heaving stones at the battered fugitive.

Luckily none of them hit him, and, under cover of this distraction, the man who had been knocked senseless by the blow of the fence rail, now dragged himself to his feet and crawled away. He had disappeared in the shadows of the distant brush before Red Stanton ceased his laughter and turned back from stoning the last fugitive.

CHAPTER V.

THE LAY OF THE LAND.

NOW there remained only one of the six. This was the man into whose body the boot of big Stanton had been driven. He lay where he had fallen. He had not stirred so much as a finger in his prostration.

"Hello!" thundered the victor.

Pete Burnside jumped to his feet.

"You through dreaming?" growled Stanton. "Then pick that gent up, throw some water on him, and bring him over here. I got to ask him some questions."

Whereupon he calmly sat down and resumed the meal which had been interrupted by the battle. And down the side of his head, where the rough edge of the stone had grazed him, ran a crimson trickle. It reached his collar and then ran down slowly over his shirt. Pete stared in fascination. This was not courage; this was simply the absence of fear. It made him feel more horror than admiration.

But it was impossible to resist the command. Ah, yes, time had been when he would have smiled to hear such words from any man; time had been when death was nothing, and honor was all. But now he had seen a miracle —he had seen his bullets, he could have sworn, strike a human body at twenty paces and less and do no harm!

Pete went obediently to the fallen man and turned the latter upon his back and brought him to the firelight. The man seemed dead, and dead, Pete Burnside thought him at first glance. But when a handful of water was thrown into his face, he recovered almost at once. He sat up, groaning and grunting, clasping himself around the body with both arms and swaying himself back and forth. At length he managed to gasp back his breath.

"Kick the skunk over this way!" bellowed Red Stanton through a gust of laughter, for the sight of the hobo's contortions had made him roar with glee.

Accordingly Pete attempted to help the injured man to his feet, but the latter pushed aside such assistance.

"I don't need no help from you, you rat!" he snarled at Pete. "You sat back by the fire and let us do the dirty

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work. Yaller—you're yaller, you hound! And when I get shut of this here mess I'll find you ag'in and open your carcass for you and let in the sunshine."

Staggering to his feet the man went to the big man.

"Sit down!" barked Red Stanton.

He reinforced his command by hurling a chunk of wood at the head of the tramp. The latter attempted to dodge, but he was much too weak to move with any celerity. The flying missile struck him across the chest and the arm which he had thrown up to protect himself. With a thud he went down and fell flat on his back.

"Sit up!" thundered Red Stanton. Picking up a coal from the fire at the end of a stick, he tossed it so deftly that it fell near the face of the prostrate man.

Pete Burnside groaned with horror, but the scorching fire quickly brought the unlucky tramp to his senses. Brushing the lump of coal out of harm's way he sat up, but said nothing. He watched his captor in silence. His rat-sharp eyes admitted defeat, admitted that he had endangered his life by the attack in which he had joined upon the giant. Whatever came his way was no more than his due.

"Now, dad," said the giant, "you and me are going to have a little chat—understand?"

The other nodded, but said not a word. And Pete Burnside, watching, tried to moisten his dry lips. What would he have done in the same case? With what courage would he have been able to bear up against such brutality?

Such was the feeling in him, and a base fear set him shaking, for he knew that he would have whined and begged. There was not a courageous fiber left intact in his whole being.

"Now look here," said Red Stanton, "I ain't much of a hand for traveling around and getting the facts about a country. And I want to know what's what in this here range. You've been around here quite a spell, I take it!"

"This is a poor country for a bo," said the tramp. "There ain't any worse. These cow-punchers that ain't got any sense about giving away their time and their money, they sure hate to see anybody around that ain't working steady. They'll ride ten miles and swim a river to rope a bo and get him on the end of a rope, so's they can have some fun with him. And what they call fun is plain torture! Nope, I sure would rather batter the door of jails for handouts than try to get anything out the kitchen of a ranch house. They ain't even got any work to do, unless you can ride and rope and such stuff. But I take it that you know all about that as well as me." And he glanced significantly to the cow-puncher's outfit which Red Stanton was wearing.

"Look here," said the latter, "you been around here. Tell me what's what. I ain't much of a hand to ride the freights. I don't get on with the shacks, and the shacks don't get on with me. I've cleaned up on about a dozen of 'em in the last couple of weeks, but before long a dozen of 'em will start to clean up on me. They're getting to know me, and that means the finish. They'll bean me and roll me off a train that's hitting up fifty per. And that's all! So what I want to do is to work in on some graft around here—me and my friend!"

Here he raised his head and stared at Pete, with a brutal grin which promised the latter that he was by no means through with his hard time.

"I don't get your drift," said the tramp.

"Ain't there nothing stirring around these parts?"

"Nothing that a gent could take a hand in," said the hobo. "The only easy money that's loose is for them that know the country and got hosses and

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kin ride and shoot. There's a gent named Daly that's cleaning up big rustling cows and hosses up yonder."

"Huh?" grunted Red. "Might that be Joe Daly?"

"Yep, his name is Joe. Is he a friend of yours?"

"He's a friend of a friend of mine," said Red, and he grinned again with great meaning to Pete.

"Oh, he's cleaning up big," said the hobo. "He's up yonder, somewhere in them mountains in the third range."

"Around Mount Sumner?"

"I guess that's the name of the mountain—that one with the three heads."

"Right!"

"What this Daly does is pretty rich. He gets his boys together and starts in running cows. He gets a pile of coin ahead. Then he starts working the game both ways. He comes down to the ranchers. He points out that the sheriff ain't been able to do no good—that's a regular hole-in-the-wall country, so's a sheriff and a posse ain't got no chance at all—and he offers to furnish a sort of irregular police—if they'll pay him something tolerable fat!"

"That sounds queer," said Red Stanton.

"Well, the point was that the news got to spreading around that somebody was running off cows in them Sumner Mountains, and a lot of other gents come along and started following the good example. What Daly wanted to do was to get rid of the competition. And he's done it pretty well! He's got a gang of mighty hard riders and hard fighters, and he ain't no slouch himself. I've heard tell that he cleaned up on Pete Burnside himself, but I guess that's just talk."

"Might be that it is," said Red, grinning again.

And Pete, hanging his head, wished that he were dead indeed. Even now his broken spirit could not rally, for Fate had spoken against him once, and it was folly to go against her dictates.

"Go on with Daly."

"What he does is to collect something pretty fat from some of the ranchers, and he keeps them all free and clear. They never loose so much as one calf in a whole season, you see? And every once in a while Daly rounds up some of the smaller gents that are rustling. He get's 'em and hangs 'em in a row on a tree and drives back the cows to the ranch that owns 'em. But some of the ranchers ain't going to pay no money for a tax to a gent like Daly. That's mostly because old Doc Peters keeps his head up and says it's a plumb disgrace, if they got to pay blackmail. Well, those gents have a pretty bad time, because them are the ones that Daly makes his own special picking, and he works 'em right down to the bone. That's the only game that I know around here. If you want to try your hand at something pretty big, you can throw in with Daly. But it sure means a whole pack of hard riding!"

"I hate riding," said Red with a sigh. "I ain't got no comfort in the saddle." And he looked down gloomily at his great bulk. "How long has Daly been running things?" he asked.

"I dunno—three or four months, maybe longer."

"And don't nobody know what he's doing?"

"Everybody guesses that he's robbing some and blackmailing others, but they ain't sure."

"How long will he last?"

"Until the gents up in them parts get together and make an army and clean out the hills. If you want to get a fancy job and a salary, you can go up to old Peters' ranch and hire out as a plain cow-puncher. He can't keep no hands, because Daly just cleans out his men as quick as they come!"

"How's that?"

"Lays for 'em in the hills and gives

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'em a run whenever they get far away from the ranch house. Tied one gent up in a tree, and he stayed there three days. He was nutty when they cut him down, and he ain't got his sense back yet, they say!"

"What would Peters pay?"

"Mostly anything."

"Well," said the big man, "I guess this talk ain't been wasted. Now—get out!"

The hobo rose.

"And if you sneak around and try to get back at me, I'll tear you in two!"

But that thunderous voice was not needed. The hobo shrank back to the edge of the shrubbery. There he glared at the conqueror, with keen, glittering eyes of fear and hatred. A moment later he had melted into the background.

"Well, Pete?" asked Red Stanton, turning on the latter. "How does it sound to you?"

"What?" gasped Pete, hardly daring to guess what the big man intended.

"How does it sound to you to go up to Peters ranch and get a job, being a sort of a garrison in the fort, eh?"

Pete Burnside drew a long breath. It was too terrible to have been inspired by any one except the devil himself. Go to the Sumner Mountains? Run the risk of encountering that rock of his destruction, Joe Daly himself? He felt the blood rush out of his brain, and he was sick at heart.

"Red," he said heavily, "I can't go!"

"Can't go?" thundered the giant. "Can't go? Ain't I got to have somebody to go along and take care of me? Sure you're going, and don't forget it."

CHAPTER VI.

DOC PETERS.

ONLY a man with a powerful imagination could have looked upon the site of the Peters ranch and seen its possibilities. No part of the ground was level, no part of it was without a surfacing of rocks which grew out of the soil. But, in spite of precipices and rocks and hills and ravines and thundering avalanches and snow slides in the winter and quick-shooting, noisy water courses in the spring season of the melting snows—in spite of all these things, hardy cattle could make a living, and a good living, among the Sumner Mountains. For, among the rocks, the soil was rich, and the grass, where it grew, was thick, long, and nutritious.

But civilization in its westward course had split around the Summer Mountains as around a rock. It was not until Doc Peters came into the Sumner Mountains that any man conceived its possibilities. Doc Peters backed his judgment with his money. In ten years twenty men had followed his example. The Sumner Mountains were filled with odd ranches, in the center of which huge mountains shot up above timber line. But the important thing was that there was plenty of grass for cattle, and cattle multiplied and grew fat.

In ten years Peters had become a wealthy man. He himself did not exactly know how wealthy. What he understood was that when he wanted to buy anything, there was always money with which to buy it; what he understood was that he could give his daughter Miriam all that her heart desired. When the first crash in prices came, Doc Peters was as one bewildered.

Calves which had been selling for fifty-six dollars were suddenly selling for six. On all sides ranchers were ruined in a single season. Then prices began to climb slowly toward normal, and, just as they reached a level at which the ranchers could again make money, rustlers appeared in the Sumner Mountains. There could not have been a better resort for such a business. There were innumerable cuts and cañons, hills and mountains. There were stretches of forest into which ten thousand head might melt and disappear for the time

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being. And so the rustlers stole here and stole there and waxed fat. If they were pursued, they could generally dodge the pursuers and keep the cattle; at the worst they could abandon their stolen gains and make good their own escape.

That is, they could do all these things until Joe Daly appeared on the scene, as a sort of enforcer extraordinary of the law. Then, to be sure, rustlers were captured right and left, and captured sections of herds were restored to their rightful owners. Every man who was willing to pay tribute—and fat tribute—to Joe Daly, went free. So confident became that gentleman that he actually guaranteed to pay for any loss in stolen cattle out of his own pocket.

Doc Peters, however, preferred to take his losses in cattle rather than to fatten the bank account of that consummate rogue. Rather, it should be said, that Miriam objected. She had left her school to help on the ranch. In the space of a single month she had transformed herself into a cow girl. She had supplied the good will which carried her father cheerfully through that first terrible season of losses. And she was still with him, now that the ranch had begun to climb toward prosperity again, only to be stopped halfway up the ladder by the depredations of the rustlers. Then it was that Joe Daly came, offering his protection. Every one knew his game. He had begun the entire rustling operations in the Sumner Mountains. Now he was choosing this novel means of freezing out his competitors. And he himself would prey on those who refused to pay him tribute for protection. It was a neat game. But, though every one saw through it, no one knew how to avoid the wiles of Joe. While Doc Peters was gravely conferring with this smiling robber, Miriam herself appeared on the scene. She had gone to work upon Joe Daly with a speed and effectiveness that bewildered that cunning ruffian. Every word she spoke was a crushing blow to him.

"Mr. Daly," she had said, "I've heard your talk with dad. You offer to protect us with your men. I want to be sure that you *have* men!"

"There ain't any doubt of that," Joe Daly had grinned. "Everybody has seen my boys around. And they're a hardy gang. Eh, doc."

Doc Peters made a wry face and nodded.

"Most of them have been with you ever since you came into the mountains?" asked the girl.

"More or less."

"Then what have they been doing to make a living, Mr. Daly?"

"Eh?" he grunted at her.

"You haven't a ranch," she answered sharply. "How have you managed to support all those men during these months?"

Joe Daly swallowed hard. "Oh, just doing one thing or another," he had said.

"Hush up, Miriam," her father had said, in pity for the humiliation of Joe.

"I will," she had said, "when I've told him what I think everybody in the Sumner Mountains guesses about him. They all say, Mr. Daly, that you've been making your living by rustling cows. But, whether you have or not, we'll pay no money for protection. We have a sheriff for that job. We'll hire some deputies for him, but you'll get nothing out of us, Mr. Daly."

Joe Daly listened to this outburst with a wicked smile, and when he left the ranch he had vowed to wipe it clean of live stock.

Industriously he set to work to accomplish this object. Time and again droves were herded away. Time and again the men on the Peters place vainly rushed into the mountains or down the cañons in pursuit. Once or twice they had come close, but they had

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been repelled by a rattling volley from half a dozen repeating rifles. One such warning was enough; they fell back and waited until another day. But the day never came when their force to pursue was nearly as great as the force of the thieves in flight to defend themselves. On the whole there could not have been a more hopeless war. And so it was that Doc Peters sent away to the far, far south and brought up a terrible man of battle, Dan Bunder. The price which Dan Bunder charged for his services was high, but he was worth it.

His sharp instinct for trouble led him into it before he had been on the ranch twenty-four hours. He came upon a lone horseman in the hills, challenged him, and was answered with a bullet. That bullet flew wide, for the ample reason that the slug from Dan's own gun had smashed through the body of the other. He took the man to the ranch house where he died from loss of blood, refusing to the last to tell his name, or his errand in the hills, or who, if any one, was connected with him. Nevertheless it was known that he was one of the gang.

After that first signal victory, Dan was not quiet. He scouted abroad again, hunting for scalps with all the joy of any Indian. He came on three of Joe Daly's best men engaged in running off a few young steers for the larder in Daly's camp. There followed a terrific battle. One of Joe's men was mortally wounded; another was shot twice through the body, and he was brought back to Daly's camp to die. The third member of the party had been shot through the left arm and nearly bled to death on the trail.

There was a muster of forces among the rustlers and a review of what had happened. They found that three of their men had been killed and one had been wounded by this man-slaying demon from the south country. Various means of getting rid of him were suggested, but the chief himself made the most appreciated suggestion. He declared that he would ride down to the ranch, wait for the coming out of the new man hunter, and have it out with him, as soon as they were beyond sight of the ranch buildings.

Daly was as good as his word. The next day Dan Bunder was found dead among the hills, near the ranch house of Doc Peters. There was this peculiarity about the affair! It was found that Dan had fired twice before he died, and at an enemy who, according to the prints of the horses' hoofs, had not been far away. And yet they could find no trace of the effects of his bullets. There was no blood trail, nor was there anything to indicate that a wounded man had spurred desperately away from the place. Instead there were ample tokens that he had come up to the dead body, had examined the pockets and wallet of Dan Bunder, and even lingered to smoke a cigarette at the spot. All this was seen, and it was considered a miracle that so deadly a shot as Dan should have actually fired twice without inflicting the least apparent injury upon his opponent!

But there was a greater catastrophe for Doc Peters, following immediately upon the heels of the death of Dan. The tidings of his exploits had made it possible to hire a full quota of cowpunchers for the ranch work. But now the new hands left in a sudden panic. Where Doc Peters should ordinarily have had ten men, his force was limited to five, and these were all such old and decrepit fellows that it was apparent that only the knowledge of their age gave them the courage to stay on the ranch and face the dangers of Joe Daly and Joe's gang.

Such was the situation when, on this dreary night, as Doc Peters sat quietly opposite his silent daughter in the living room of the old ranch house, there

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came a heavy knocking on the door. When Doc opened it, a red-headed giant was seen standing outside in the night.

"I hear tell," he said, after they had exchanged the usual greeting, "that you want hands?"

"I sure do," said Doc curiously. "Come in and set down."

There entered a monster with intolerably bright and steady blue eyes which roved leisurely around the room; and beside him and a little to the rear was a companion who was quite dwarfed by the comparison, a rather bow-legged man who stood with hanging head.

As Doc Peters said later to his daughter: "A man and a half and half a man makes two men, so the new hands will do pretty good."

CHAPTER VII.

MIRIAM'S WONDER.

"MY idea," said the big man, who by removing his hat had showed a great mop of red hair, "is to get some of the boys together and go hunting Daly and his crew. What d'you say to that, Doc Peters?"

"You won't get a crew around here," asserted Doc Peters. "The boys ain't got any stomach for fighting or trailing Joe Daly. They say that bullets don't even make no dent in him!"

Pete Burnside shuddered.

"Well," declared Red Stanton, "I'm one, and my partner here, Pete, is another that'll take the trail. Eh, Pete?"

Here he clapped Pete on the shoulder, and the latter winced. Pete fought with all his might to stand straight and nod a cheerful answer; he strove with all his force to appear at his best before this bright-eyed girl who was watching so intently. But he could only cringe. The very name of Joe Daly sent water instead of blood through his veins. Sickness took hold of the very heart of him. From the corner of his eye he saw scorn pass like a shadow over the face of the girl.

Suddenly she stepped to Red Stanton and shook his hand. "I have faith in you," she said.

And it sickened Pete Burnside to see her lift her head and smile up into his companion's brutal face.

"I have faith," she repeated. "I know that you can't lose!"

"Lose?" roared Red Stanton. "I ain't ever started a fight yet that I ain't won. I dunno what it means to get licked. Ask Pete, here. He'll tell you!"

Red winked with brutal meaning at the rancher and his daughter. He could not see the shadow of disgust which darkened their eyes for a moment. But here was an ally too powerful to be turned away simply because he seemed to be a bully and a braggart.

So they sat down with the two newcomers. They placed them at a table where there was more food than even the tremendous capacity of Red was equal to. And, while the two travelers ate, they were given in detail the history of the struggle against Daly, and in particular the feat of Dan Bunder in killing no less than two of the Daly gang, as was known, and three, as was conjectured. But since Dan had been killed in single combat with a man who must have been Joe Daly himself, no one in the mountains could be induced to take service on the Peters Ranch, with the exception of a few half-worthless hands who were shielded from the gunfighters by their great age. It would be a problem of the very first water to get even a handful of willing men together to attack such an enemy as Joe Daly had demonstrated himself to be.

Here Red smashed his great hand upon the table with such force that the dishes chimed.

"Leave that to me!" he said. "Lemme offer 'em money. Lemme go to town to get 'em, and I'll come back with men enough!"

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It seemed impossible that he could do as he promised. But the next morning he mounted the only horse on the ranch capable of bearing his tremendous bulk with any ease or speed. On this mount he made the journey to the village on the eastern edge of the mountains. He entered in the late morning. He went straight to the combination general-merchandise store, post office, etc. There he emptied his six-shooter to the accompaniment of a wild whooping that brought every inhabitant out and ready for action. Afterward he harangued the crowd.

It was a good speech. He declared that he had come down for men. They were to get three dollars a day and their keep. They were to get good chuck. And there might be a small ration of moonshine whisky at the end of each day's work, if all went well. Also, their hours were to be short, and their work during those hours was to be light. They were not going to ride the range all the day. There was to be no wearisome wandering along a fence repairing the breaks and lifting the sagging wire. No, all they were to do was to join in a man hunt!

He made this pause and surveyed his audience with a growing enthusiasm. He would himself lead in that man hunt. He would ask no man to go where he, Red Stanton, did not first lead the way. He would ask nothing impossible of any of those who happened to serve under him. Not only did he make these promises, but he also declared that the number he could take was limited. Some men, he knew, would have been glad to take fifty men to do the work which he had in hand. But Red Stanton would admit only an even dozen men to the hunt. And he reserved the right to pick that dozen to suit himself from all those who flocked in to volunteer their services.

It was a master stroke, that limitation of the posse. It did what the promise of fat wages could not do. It put a distinguishing badge upon all who should be so fortunate as to be chosen to take part in the expedition. Money, indeed, could never have induced them to come forward. But, since it was to be a measure of merit, that, to be sure, was quite another thing.

Red Stanton got a room at the hotel and spent two hours there interviewing men who clamored for a place in the ranks. And it was not until he had each man closeted in the room that he confessed the object of the expedition was to be against no other person than Joe Daly himself.

They heard it with abashed eyes and a scowl, but they would not take a step backward, once they had engaged their honor. Before the two hours were passed, Red Stanton had sifted out twelve of the hardiest men in Casterville. Of all the rough towns in the Sumner Mountains, this was the roughest; and of the toughest inhabitants in Casterville, Red Stanton chose the worst. He chose them by instinct; he recognized his brothers in heart, if not in blood. And, by an odd coincidence, when he had finally chosen all his worthies, it was found that there was not one of the twelve who had not passed some days of his life in a prison.

Such were the men with whom Red Stanton returned to the ranch of Doc Peters. They filled the old bunk house with a thunder of drunken merriment that night, for Red Stanton had lived up to his word and had procured some moonshine whisky of innocent and watery appearance and terrible potency. But when the morning after the revel arrived, these hardy souls merely doused their faces in water, shrugged their shoulders, and prepared for the work of the day.

That work began at once. Red Stanton was thrilled by the praise and the wonder of Doc Peters, when the latter saw the troop of heavy cavalry which

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had been rallied to his cause by the ruffian. He was thrilled, more than by the words of the rancher, by the smile of Miriam from the background, and he started as soon as they had finished their breakfast. He took with him Josh Tompson, the only one of the cow-punchers then on the place with nerves steady enough to make him of any use. Josh had many ideas about where the headquarters of the rustlers might be, and he was willing to point out what he knew to the warriors, though he warned them every step of the way that they were apt to be shot, to the last man, by a hurricane of rifle bullets which might pour down at them at any moment.

While preparations were making for the start, Red Stanton lingered at the ranch house. He wished to state his self-assurance once more for the delectation of the rancher and the rancher's daughter.

"But they'll get the start on you, Red," said Doc Peters.

"My hoss will be ready with the rest of 'em," said the giant. "Pete does my saddling for me."

"Is Pete your slave?" asked Miriam with sudden interest.

"Pete's a no-good one," said the other in a large manner. "He ain't worth much. You'll watch him start out with the rest of us this morning, but he won't keep up with us. Nope, his hoss'll go lame—or something. I know! He'll have to drop behind and——"

"The hound!" snarled Doc Peters.

"Why do you keep such a creature with you?" asked Miriam, shuddering as though she had been hearing of some unclean thing.

"Well," said Red Stanton, "he's pretty handy for saddling the hosses and making the fires and patching the clothes and such like. Besides, I ain't got the heart to turn him loose where other gents can kick him around. I'm sort of used to him and sorry for him, lady!"

Here his horse appeared, saddled and led by Pete Burnside.

"I'm with you, Red," called Doc Peters. "I ain't going to stay behind here!"

"Don't be a fool," growled the giant. "Ain't you going to keep a guard here at the house on all your chuck—and your hoss feed—and your family?"

He leered winningly at Miriam as he spoke. But, no matter how offensive his manner, it was perfectly apparent that he was right. A guard must be kept at the ranch house, and the rancher himself must take up that duty. So, frothing with impatience, Peters watched the expedition take to horse and thunder away down the slope to an accompaniment of yells and curses. In the rear rode Pete Burnside. After him the girl pointed.

"Do you see that?" she cried to her father.

"Yes," he nodded.

"What's wrong with the man they call Pete?"

"I dunno," answered her father, "When a gent is yaller there ain't no way of explaining him. He's just plumb wrong all the way through."

"But that man Pete," said the girl, "I can't explain how he haunts me. He did last night in my sleep, after I had seen his face for the first time. He fascinates me. He seems to be in torment all the time."

"Because he always knows that he's yaller," said her father, "and he's afraid that somebody's going to find it out!"

"I'll wager," she answered after a little interval of silence, "that he finishes the ride with the rest of them to-day. I'll wager that, if there's a fight, he fights as bravely as any of them!"

"Miriam, you're talking foolish. A dog can't act like a lion, and he's just a plain hound with no heart to him."

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"Don't say it!" breathed the girl. "It's too horrible!"

"He ain't the only coward in the world, honey."

"But I keep thinking——"

"What?"

"I keep thinking that he's been a brave man once, and that he's trying to be brave again."

"Miriam, quit your dreaming. Take a ride right over the hill, and you'll find him somewhere pulled up just the way that Red Stanton said you'd find him!"

She followed the impulse which had taken hold on her. In five minutes she was in the saddle and heading into the sharp wind which was blowing out of the northeast. An elbow twist around the pointed shoulder of a hill brought her suddenly in full view of her quarry. Not fifty feet away was Pete Burnside. The wind which blew from him to her cut away his chance of hearing her, and his back was turned, cutting off his chance of seeing her. She jerked her neat-footed pony behind some saplings and peered out curiously into the hollow.

Pete Burnside she had seen in the act of stopping his horse. Now she saw him drop limply out of the saddle. She saw him crouch down on the ground. She saw him take his head between his arms. She saw his body racked and tormented and quivering with pain.

Never had she seen a man act like that before. It was as though a bullet had torn through his vitals. The horse from which he had thrown himself, sniffed curiously at the bowed head of his late master and then turned away to pluck at some grass near by. And still Pete was curled up in a knot.

Then she understood, and the understanding sickened her. She had been right in her first guess. Fear, as her father had said, had stopped this poor renegade and made him stay out of the group which was riding toward the mountains. And now the bitterest shame was making him writhe in an agony. She watched with horror and with awe. And then suddenly she turned the head of her horse away, as though she had been eavesdropping where she had no right. And, when she came back to the house of her father, she said not a word to him. She kept what she had seen to herself, as though she had entered upon a part of the shame.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAPTIVE'S SADDLEBAG.

OLD Josh did not content himself with pointing out the way toward what he was sure was the main rendezvous of the rustlers. He stayed with the riders all the day. Fourteen strong, they journeyed deeper and deeper into the Sumner Mountains. And in the late afternoon they started back, fifteen strong for the Peters ranch house.

They had picked up one man in their journey, and with that man they came to Doc Peters at the close of the day. They described how they had taken him and how they had questioned him. But he would not return an answer. They wanted to know whether or not he had formed a part of the gang which operated under Joe Daly. They demanded to know where the rendezvous of that gang might be. But the prisoner would not speak. In vain they had tried every persuasion on him. They had tried to corner him by showing their knowledge that the very horse which he rode was known to be the favorite horse of Joe Daly, but still he could not be induced to speak.

Then Red Stanton had tried other measures. The muzzle of the unfortunate man's own six-shooter had been heated and pressed into his flesh. He had fainted, but he did not speak. They dragged him down to the ranch house, reeling in the saddle, but with his jaws locked together; the pain of his torture

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and the weakness which followed it, were on his forehead, but his eyes were still strong with defiance. They brought him into the ranch house. When they dropped their hands from his shoulders, he stood swaying from side to side before Peters.

"Now," said Red Stanton, grinding his teeth with fury because the man had held out so long against him, "now it's your chance, Doc. You've got something agin' this gent. You can make him talk out. All you got to do is to make him tell you where we can get at Joe Daly, and your job is finished."

"D'you mean torture it out of him, boys?" asked the rancher slowly.

"Dad!" cried Miriam.

To Red Stanton in the morning it had seemed that nothing was more important than to win the favor of the girl. He could have sworn that the happiest man in the mountains was that man who could make her smile. But since the morning another nature had risen in Red Stanton, his true self. Now he swung around on the girl with his muscular arm outstretched, pointing. But it was almost as though he had struck her down.

"You," he said, "what are you doing in here? Ain't this a man's place to hear man talk? Run along and sit in a corner. You ain't wanted here!"

She shrank away from him, but she kept her head high.

"Dad!" she pleaded. "Do you permit one of your men to talk to me like this?"

"I'm telling her to keep away from this sort of a job," explained Red, a little more mildly to the rancher. "Ain't I right?"

"You are," said Peters. Inwardly he was boiling with rage at the insolence of the big man, but he was forced to admit that Red had been of great service to him already and might be of still more value in the immediate future.

"Miriam, you ain't needed here."

His voice was drowned by a roar of beastlike violence from Red Stanton.

"Look at the yaller-hearted hound!" he thundered. "There's Pete! Look at him, boys! Look at him come creeping in! Why, I got a mind——"

He gave over words for a more direct and effectual expression of his emotions. He caught up the chair which was nearest him. Though the chair was heavy, and though he used only one hand to swing it, yet he sent it whirling across the room with such terrific speed and force that Pete Burnside had not time to dodge. He was struck by the flying missile and sent crashing into a corner. And when he staggered, half stunned, to his feet, he was greeted with a huge burst of laughter. Even Red Stanton dissolved in mirth. He had pacified himself in the joy of seeing poor Pete tumbling head over heels. Now he laughed and laughed again, swaying his great bulk from side to side; but Pete strove to cringe away through the door.

"Stay here!" thundered the bully.

Pete paused.

"Come back and stay here till I tell you to go. I dunno, I might have a job for you to do."

Miriam watched the white and working face of Pete, watched it until shame and grief choked her and made her stare down to the floor. It was as though she had herself stood in the flesh of this craven and tormented man.

Suddenly all attention was focused on Peters.

"Red," he said, "if you try a thing like that ag'in, I'm through with you —understand? I don't care what you can do for me, I'm through with you!"

"Sorry, chief," said Stanton, "but when I seen that sneak and remembered how he'd ducked out of the trouble that we'd been hunting all day—when I seen that sneaking face of his—why, I couldn't help sort of busting out." He went on hastily to change the subject. "But there's something to be got out of

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this gent, boss. Ask him what he's doing with this, will you? We tried to get him to talk, but he wouldn't say a word to us. He wouldn't do no explaining."

As he spoke he drew out of a saddlebag, which he had been carrying, a rectangular object blunted at the corners. It was backed with a heavy quilting, and the upper surface of it was armor steel finely chased and engraved.

"I found this here thing in his saddlebag," said Red. "He wouldn't do no talking, but I figure that maybe this means something. Maybe this scrawling stuff is a code."

"I'm sure I don't know," said the rancher in mild wonder. "I can't figure what——"

Miriam came suddenly forward from the corner where she had remained after the outbreak of Stanton. She took from the ruffian's hand the object he had been holding.

"Dad," she said, turning her back on the rest, "there's no need to ask him what it is. I know."

"Well, Miriam, what is it?"

"A breastplate—an old piece of armor."

"What the deuce would a gent be using armor for? That ain't got sense, Miriam!"

"Don't they still wear it—a regular coat of mail—don't men wear it in Mexico and along the border when they expect that they may get into a knife fight?"

"I know that," replied her father, "but this here thing ain't mail. Who'd wear a thing that heavy to keep from a knife?"

"Why not from bullets then?"

"What you mean?"

"I say, why not wear that old breastplate to turn a bullet?"

"Honey, a rifle bullet would go through that like it was a piece of cheese!"

"Yes, a rifle bullet has penetrating power, but what about a revolver bullet—a big, soft slug of lead? Would that go through?"

"I'll be durned!" gasped the rancher. "I never thought about that."

"It's an idea sure enough," muttered Red Stanton. "We'll try it out!"

Catching the steel plate from the hand of the girl, he propped it against the wall at the side of the room. He stood back, whipped out his Colt, and pumped three shots squarely into the center of his target. Then he ran across, while the echo of the last shot was still humming in all ears, and picked up the little slab of steel.

"Well, dog-gone my hide!" roared Red Stanton. "Not a one of them slugs went through. Look here—I didn't no more'n put a dent in the surface. And here's other places. Look here, partners, and here! There's pretty close onto twenty dents, much like the three I've put into her. I tell you what, this ain't the first time that this here thing has been shot at!"

They crowded around it, clamoring with wonder, and from the farther side of the room arose Pete Burnside. His square jaw was set, and his face was white, and there was an almost maniacal light in his eyes. He was drawn nearer and near to the center of interest. His movements were like those of a sleep walker.

In the meantime the talk turned back to the stranger from whose saddlebag that steel plate, with the quilting down the back, had been taken. The controversy raged hot about him. Should all that he knew be torn out of him? Should they torture him until he was glad to speak?

They even forgot about the old breastplate. Pete was allowed to pick it up. He seized it in trembling hands and retired to a corner of the room. There the girl saw him bend over the plate and study it with a wild interest,

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a passion so consuming that he seemed to be trying to tear a secret out of the very steel.

CHAPTER IX.

NOTHING BUT A BIG JOKE.

DURING the night the prisoner stirred and suddenly sat up in his bed. It availed him little to sit up, however, for his wrists were chained together, and one wrist was fastened in turn to one of the posts of the iron bed. They had taken no chance that he might escape, as though there could be strength in his fever-stricken, tormented body to make even the effort!

Now he listened with starting eyes to a faint sound at the door to his room. Could it be that the incarnate devils were coming back? Could it be that Red Stanton, furious because he had not been permitted by the rancher to torture his victim in the evening again, as he had tortured him during the day, was now coming back to claim the helpless man for fresh brutalities? There were many ways of inflicting the most exquisite tortures. One might light a match and hold it close to the flesh of a man who was so bound that he could not move.

Darkness swam before the eyes of the prisoner at the very thought. Yes, he was weak, he was very weak, and his nerves jumped and twitched. He could not endure torture again. He would break down. The secrets would tumble from his lips before he knew it.

Oh, it was true! Some one was opening the door to the room in which he lay. Not that he could see anything, no matter how he strained his eyes, but a strange sixth sense made him aware that they were close to him. Now the door closed with the softest of clicks; and now some one was stealing closer to him. Oh, horror of horrors! Heaven only grant that he might die like a man rather than shame himself! If only he could see the door by the light of the day, but this stifling blackness of the night—— He set his teeth and forced away the faintness. His mind was clearing. Presently he heard a whisper from the darkness.

"Partner, there ain't nothing for you to be afraid of. Keep your nerve plumb steady!"

A delirious joy ran through the weak body of the victim. It seemed that he could not stand this sudden thrill of hope which rushed through him.

"Who is it?" he gasped. "Joe Daly, it ain't you yourself?"

There was a little silence, as he turned cold again. Could it be that this was only a trap to trick him into admitting that he knew Daly?

"I ain't Daly," said the whisperer in the blackness, "but I'm one that'll do you no harm. Will you believe that?"

"Yes! But who are you?"

"I'm the gent that they call Pete."

The prisoner sank back on the bed with the faintest of groans. He remembered, now. What could be either feared or hoped for at the hands of such a craven?

"I've come up here to have a talk," went on Pete. "Partner, I want to find out who wore this here breastplate that they got out of your saddlebag."

"What good would it do me to tell you, even if I knowed?" asked the prisoner.

"I got a key to unlock these here locks that are holding you. I swiped it just now from Red Stanton——"

"That devil—I'll tear the heart out of him if I live to get a square chance at him."

"You'll get that chance if you talk to me straight."

"About this here piece of steel?"

"Yes, I want to know who wore it."

"What could that mean to you?"

"I'm just curious."

"Well, I'll tell you. Charlie Burnet got this thing to keep for——"

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"That's a lie," said Pete Burnside. "Charlie Burnet ain't the gent that used to wear it."

"If you know, what are you asking me for? And even if I should tell you, how can I be sure that you'll be able to turn me loose?"

"You got my word of honor, and something'll tell you that I mean what I say!"

"How could it mean anything to you to know who used to wear this?"

"It means more to me than a million-dollar gold mine! I been lying awake thinking about it!"

"The devil you have! Well, it's sure queer to me what makes you so interested in it, but I'll tell you the fact and no kidding. Joe Daly himself has been wearing this right around his neck and under his shirt."

"Thank the Lord," broke in Pete Burnside. "Thank the Lord I know that now!"

"And your promise——" cut in the prisoner.

"I'll keep that!"

Instantly the key dropped into the first padlock. and it clicked open. In another moment the prisoner stood on his feet.

"And now Red Stanton!" he snarled softly through the darkness.

"What?" asked Pete Burnside.

"I'm going to get that hound and carve the heart out of him!"

"Wait till you got daylight, and he's awake."

"Did he give me any fair chance when he caught me? No, he mobbed me, and then he tortured me."

His voice choked away to nothing, as he recalled the horror of that long pain.

"You'll start riding now with me," said Burnside.

"*You* ain't got any call to love him!" exclaimed the man of the gang. "Ain't I seen him talk to you like you was a dog? Ain't I seen him knock you down with a chair?"

"You've seen that," said Pete Burnside.

And suddenly he was laughing, but the sound of his laughter made the flesh of the rustler creep. "I'll have a little accounting with him for all that," said Pete, "but I got another job now."

"What's that?"

"I got to ride up to see Joe Daly."

"Eh?"

"I mean it. You and me got to ride up to see him."

"I'll never show you the way, Pete!"

"Let's get outside, and we'll talk more about it."

He led the way to the window. It was ridiculously easy to get down. Pete tied one end of a blanket around a nail, and then the rustler climbed down. He had scarcely reached the ground, when Pete landed beside him.

"Now we'll get our hosses and start," said Pete, and he led the way to the corral behind the barns.

They secured their mounts. Pete did the roping and then the saddling, for the whole right side of the rustler, including muscles which must be strained if he moved his arm, was terribly inflamed from the manner in which that burning steel had been thrust against his flesh. Nevertheless he was able to climb into his saddle. He fastened his teeth to keep back a groan; then he asked of his companion: "You got to show me a reason why you should be brought up to see Joe Daly. Are you wanting to join his gang?"

"Well, tell me man to man, ain't he got a need for new hands?"

"He sure has. There's three gone that ain't going to come back. And he needs a lot more'n five to do his business."

"Well," said Pete, "he'll be mighty interested to see me."

The other coughed.

"How come you to let Red Stanton

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walk over you that way, partner?" he asked in a cold voice.

"I had to play a part. I've had to keep after it for month after month till I been sick"—his voice raised a little—"but I'm sure done now. I'm through with that game, and I'm ready for something new."

"I dunno that I understand," growled the rustler, his horror and contempt growing, as he recalled the scene he had witnessed in the Peters house between Stanton and Pete.

"What you understand don't matter a lot," returned Pete. "What amounts to something is that Joe will understand when I meet up with him."

The rustler turned in his saddle and stared at his companion. There was no possible doubt that this was not the same man who had been abused by Red Stanton in the Peters house. His flesh might not have altered, but there was a new and braver spirit in him. The rustler drew his breath in wonder. If ever a man had been changed, this was one.

"Look here," he said. "Let's talk straight. You want me to show you the way up to where Joe Daly is hanging out. Now, how can I tell that you ain't going to——"

"To what?" asked Pete. "D'you think that maybe I'll clean up Joe and his whole gang?"

The rustler laughed.

"Oh, that sure sounds foolish," he chuckled. "But——"

"What d'you think I *would* do then?"

Again the rustler pondered for a time.

"You've turned me loose," he said at last. "It sure looks like you were a friend of Joe's. I'll take the chance. Come along, partner!"

They started out at a rocking canter, the rustler twisting in his saddle so that the torment of his injured side might be lessened. So they went on until they came to a steeper grade, where it was necessary to bring the horses back to a walk.

"I'd like to know one thing," said the rustler.

"Fire away."

"What did it mean to you to know that that breastplate belonged to Joe Daly?"

Pete was silent for a moment, then he answered: "I'll tell you the straight of it, partner. I been up here in the mountains trying to find out something that Joe would be as much interested in as I am. And it wasn't till I heard about him owning that breastplate that I knew. D'you see?"

"Something important, eh?"

"Sure it is, but if you look at it another way you might say that it's nothing but a big joke!" And, as the humor of it seemed to strike him, he broke out into loud and ringing laughter.

CHAPTER X.

BETWEEN THE EYES.

THERE was blackest gloom in the gang of Joe Daly, gloom so utter that he himself felt the shadow to some degree. But they made one great mistake in which he did not share. They felt that because three old and trusted members of the gang had recently died, their loss could not be replaced. But Joe knew this was not true. Now that his fame had grown, he had only to give a call, and he could take his pick of a hundred desperate men. In fact he could assemble fellows far more formidable than his present outfit.

But the others could not appreciate this fact. All they knew was that from eight men they had shrunk suddenly to five, and that very day one of the five had been torn away from one of their most secured haunts. It reduced them to four and the chief, Joe Daly himself.

He was now in his most favored and least used retreat, the old mine which

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had been sunk into the side of the mountain. But, instead of occupying the deserted shaft itself, he had insisted on bringing them this night to the shack which stood at the mouth of the mine, ready to collapse with age and weather. And in this shack he recklessly showed his lanterns, as though there were nothing in the world to fear. To be sure one of the men kept guard before the shack, but it was not because they might be captured. The real danger was simply that this excellent hiding place might be located, and every hiding place which was discovered, narrowed their resources for escape and hiding when they should next be pressed by the man hunters. And it seemed that from now on they could never have any surety of peace. If one rancher could by his own unassisted efforts cause so much havoc and distress, what could not be done by a league of ranchers, each with his hired posse, and each working with a wholehearted desire to end the rule of the rustlers?

These thoughts were in the minds of the most careless of the men, but Joe Daly was unperturbed. Perhaps he had come to believe in his destiny. All great criminals come to that point sooner or later. And such good fortune had favored Joe that it was little wonder if he felt that some kindly deity presided over his affairs. He dated his good luck, in fact, from that day in Manhattan when he discovered the bullet-proof breastplate and stole it away to his room. That was the strange foundation on which he had built.

When he found it, he had been a poor exile, hungry for his home country, and kept from it by the mortal dread of terrible Pete Burnside. With that bit of armor he had dared the most famous gun fighters time and again since his battle with Pete, and he had always been victorious. His fame had spread. There was no man in his band who dared to raise hand or voice against him. He was considered on all sides a hero of the first water!

But in the meantime he had outgrown that breastplate. It had saved his life to be sure, but it was by no means all that it should be. Fine steel it was, or it would never have turned the slug from a Colt pistol fired at close range. But it was by no means the sort of steel which had been invented later on to turn the cutting noses of armor-piercing bullets. And the outlaw determined that he must make a change for the better. So he had sent away to have a new piece of body armor forged for him. Far away in Philadelphia he had a friend who executed the commission and saw that the corselet was made. And it was far more safe than the original plate. That slab of steel had insured him against the slug of a revolver fired at any closeness; but the new corselet, made of the very finest quality of armor steel, with a diamond-hard surface, weighed hardly any more than the breastplate, but it was so much larger that it fitted over his entire breast and abdomen and then curved under his arms. There was another very clever contrivance, also: a steel lining for his sombrero, which was strung enough to turn the slug from a Colt revolver. So equipped, he felt that he was the only man who had ever lived with so many enemies, and with so much surety of triumphing over them all!

With three of his men he sat this night in the crazy little shanty, playing poker and sipping throat-scorching moonshine from time to time, and listening to the singing of a rising storm through the boards of the shack. The old cast-iron stove, so sadly cracked that it spouted smoke and filled the cabin with a blue-white vapor twisted in wisps about the card players, they packed with wood until it roared with a crowding mass of flames. It shivered and shook with the rushing of the draft, and it managed to keep the windy hut warm

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enough for comfort, assisted by the moonshine whisky.

Not much of that whisky, however, was passing the lips of Joe Daly. To be sure, his glass was often in his hand, and he pretended to drink to every man who made a winning. But in reality few drops of the liquor found their way down his throat. Daly needed a clear head for his business.

In reality the poker games in his camp were the most important source of his revenue. Out of them he drew the many thousands which went to recruit his bank accounts. His scheme was admirable. He gave his men a very large portion of the proceeds of the crimes which he planned and organized. He was not one of those who took a third or a half of the profits as a return for the brain work which he expended upon them. Instead he merely took two shares, and out of his own shares he paid for the food, the guns, and the ammunition of the entire party.

What could have been more generous? It was plain that such an open-handed leader was working as much for the happiness of his men as for his own fame and profit. At least so thought the followers of the bandit. The other side of the picture was never exposed to their eyes. But had they kept track they might have found that what they made in their raids they quickly paid back into the pockets of the leader at the poker games. For Joe Daly was no common manipulator of the cards. He did not know many tricks, but he had his own system of marking the cards with his finger nails, a method ancient as the very hills and a million times discovered, but it was never discovered by Joe's gang. It never occurred to the worst of them that any one could be so base as to cheat the very men with whom he had been adventuring that same day, perhaps. But Joe was not bothered by the scruples of an active conscience. And, indeed, as the time went on, and his bank accounts swelled, and he saw himself becoming a rich man, he decided that it was as good to have an armor-clad conscience as it was to have an armor-clad body.

Daly had just won five hundred, and seeing his left-hand neighbor take down a wretched little bet of thirty dollars on the next hand, he poured generous doses of the moonshine into each of the tin cups.

"Here's to Harry, boys," he said. "Old Harry sure ain't had his luck tonight. Here's where his luck changes!"

Immediately the cups flashed up to do the proper honor to Harry. Before they went down, there was a clamor of voices on the outside of the cabin.

"Nobody's got a right—you must be crazy to bring him up here where——"

"Shut up! He's an old friend of the chief. Don't you suppose that I'd be sure of that before I went this far?"

And on the heels of this outburst of noise, in came the guard on a rush.

"Here's 'Bud' come back," he began.

"Bud got loose from 'em!" shouted the gamblers, springing up in joyous forgetfulness of their game.

"And he's brought up a stranger."

Bud himself here pushed into the cabin.

"Come on, Pete," he said. "Step up and meet the chief and see if he ain't glad to see you."

"Hello, Joe!" called Pete Burnside, pausing at the door of the cabin.

At his voice there was a gasp from Joe Daly. The rustler leaped away from the table until his shoulders crashed against the wall. And at the same time the other members of the gang crowded back so as to make a passage which would be clear from one of them to the other.

"By guns," breathed Daly, "it's you—Pete!"

The men of the gang turned in utter bewilderment to their chief. They found that their hero had turned the

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gray of ashes and was staring at the square-jawed man in the doorway, as though the latter were a ghost.

"I come up to pay you a call, Joe," said Burnside.

"Pete——" began the other.

"Well?"

"I got something to say to you."

"I ain't come up here just to talk."

"You dunno what you're saying, partner. All I want is to try to explain to you——"

The rustlers gaped at one another. It could not be that they were hearing aright; it could not be that their dauntless commander was knuckling down to this stranger. And Bud, with the picture of Red Stanton and the Peters house, was the most astonished of them all.

"Joe," said the other, "I got something to say that the rest of 'em might as well hear. Boys, my name's Pete Burnside!"

It sent a shock through two of them who had heard of that not obscure name.

"I was the gent that run Joe out of the mountains last year. He went away because he was afraid to face me. Then he come back all at once and sent out the word that he was just waiting for me. And when I went to meet him I got my gun first; I sent in the first shot—I could have swore that I seen him stagger—but he sure enough didn't drop. Like a sneaking hound he was wearing this right over his heart!"

Pete tossed onto the floor of the cabin the breastplate. It landed softly on its quilted back, and the rustlers stared down at it. Every one of them knew about the strange method which their chief used to make himself invulnerable. They only wondered how he could endure dressing in iron during the furious heat of the summer, or the biting cold of the winter. Yet it had not seemed to them that there was anything particularly dishonorable in his proceedings.

"Boys," said Pete Burnside, "when he'd stopped two of my bullets with this here plate of steel, he got his own gun on me at last and sent me down for the count. And when I got well I was a no-good hound. Bud, here, will tell you what I was. I didn't put no trust in myself. I'd seen my bullets go right into the mark and miss! It took all my nerve. I wasn't no more good than a hound dog!"

He paused, his face white, breathing hard.

"Then all at once I found out what had happened. It hadn't been my fault. I'd shot straight, but that hound was wearing armor when he sent to ask me to fight! And when I heard that, I got my nerve back. I come up here with Bud, letting him think that what I wanted was to join the gang. But what I really wanted was to get a crack at Joe Daly. Understand, boys, I ain't up here to spy on you. I don't have no care what you do in rustling cows. I want to rustle Joe Daly. Joe, are you ready?"

The face of Joe Daly was a study. The certainty of death was before him. But in another moment his courage returned. Like a traitor Bud had told that his chief at one time had worn the breastplate; but he could not have told about the new armor, for the simple reason that Bud did not know of it. Pete had come to strike down a man whose unfair advantage was removed; he could not know that a still greater advantage was still on the side of the chief of the rustlers. And, as the surety returned to Joe, he laughed aloud.

"Pete," he said, "I'm ready when you are—get your gun!"

As he spoke he went for his own with all the speed at his command. But slow, slow was his fastest motion compared with the sudden flash which brought the Colt into the hand of Pete Burnside. And the breast was not the

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target at which Pete fired. The muzzle of his revolver twitched higher than that, and the bullet drove squarely between the eyes of Joe. He spun around and dropped on his face. Then Pete leaped aside and backed through the door.

They followed him at once. In vain he shouted to them that he would do them no harm if they would let him alone. They rushed out through the door. The bright shaft of the lamplight illumined each one as he came. And the revolver spoke—and spoke again and again, where Pete Burnside had dropped upon one knee in the dark and emptied his six-shooter.

CHAPTER XI.

ENTER THE NEW MAN.

"IF I have to see him again in our house," said Miriam, "I won't answer for what I'll say to him!"

Her father smiled at her.

"I mean it!" she declared.

"But," said Doc Peters, "you sure got to admit that Red Stanton has plenty of nerve."

"He has courage—of a sort. He knows that he's stronger than other men, and of course that makes him confident. But that brute sort of bravery doesn't mean a great deal."

"You don't mean that, Miriam."

"But I do! And it sickens me to see his great red face and watch his insolent rolling eyes, as he stares at me. He acts as though he were paying his suit to me!"

"That's nonsense, honey!"

"I tell you, it's in his stupid head. He thinks that he's saving us, and therefore he can make any demand he wants to make."

"Well, Miriam, he *is* saving us!"

"I tell you, Joe Daly will smash him and all his gang! What have they done? They've captured one poor rascal who got away again, and——"

"He didn't get away. He was turned loose by that pleasant friend of yours."

"Dad, you're simply trying to be aggravating!"

"I'm talking facts."

"I haven't spoken a dozen words to that poor fellow Pete."

"Poor sneak thief!"

"Is it right to say that?"

"I'm staying with the facts still."

"You call him a thief because he turned the rustler loose."

"What would *you* call a thing like that?"

"I know why he did it."

"Tell me if you can."

"Pete had been used to torture. I know that. He had been broken with pain; he has been crushed by it. And that was why his heart bled for the poor rustler. I pitied him, myself—and I think of that unspeakable beast of a Stanton branding the man with a hot iron—oh, it sickens me when I think of it!"

"He was trying to tear the truth out of the rascal, and cow-punchers don't figure rustlers to be real men; they're just sort of snakes in the eyes of a puncher, Miriam. You'd ought to know that!"

"Oh, he wasn't trying to tear the truth from him. Little he cared about the truth. He was torturing that man to make him break down. He wanted to hear the rustler shriek for mercy; he wanted to make the rustler crawl the way poor Pete crawls. Oh, I can't even talk of it!"

"I know," nodded her father.

"And if Red comes into this house again, I'm not going to be here."

"Honey," said her father slowly, "I know how you feel. Red Stanton ain't a pretty thing to look at. He's got the manners of a hog and the nature of a wild cat. But I can stand bad manners, and so can you. There's only one thing that counts in all that you've been saying about him—if he really has been

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making a fool of himself in the way he's been looking at you, I'll fill him full of lead, or else just kick him off the place."

"But don't you see, dad, that's the horrible part of it? If he finds out what we think of him, he'll go mad with spite and hatred. He'd burn the house over our heads and never think about it twice. What are we to do, dad? Can't you ask him to go into the bunk house with the other men after supper?"

"He thinks it's his right to be here. Remember, Miriam, that he hired a dozen men to do work for us. And we couldn't have gone out by ourselves and hired two! You can go to town until this job is finished."

"I'll never leave you here alone with such a man!"

Doc Peters shrugged his shoulders and smiled, and his rather tired old eyes lifted and looked past the bright head of his daughter and into the stormy past. He had seen his share of trouble. He had taken his part in battles enough. Now he smiled at this touch of solicitude on the part of his girl.

That night the crowd of cow-punchers and Red Stanton's wild group of hired men crowded into the dining room and filled the place with uproar. And when they had finally stamped their way out again, Red, as usual, tilted back in his chair and drank extra cups of coffee. And all the while he was keeping his eyes fixed upon Miriam.

Peters had been wondering how it was that such a worm of a man as Pete had managed to find the courage to defy them all and set the prisoner free.

"But you don't know that man!" said Miriam. "I'll wager that there's still courage in him. I'll wager that he was once brave."

"Brave?" echoed Red Stanton, eagerly seizing upon this chance to win the favorable attention of the girl. "Say, lady, maybe you dunno what his whole name is?"

"What is it?" she asked, on fire with eagerness.

"Pete Burnside!" he answered pompously.

Here Doc Peters jumped up and ran across the room, though he was a man who was rarely much moved.

"You mean to say that's Pete Burnside?"

"I mean that."

"Miriam!" cried the rancher, turning on his daughter. "Think of that?"

"I don't think I've heard about him," she said wretchedly.

"Never heard? That comes of taking all that time to go to a fool school in the East," exploded her father. "But you remember about the train robbery four years back, when the robbers blew up the guards in the mail coach simply because there was nothing worth taking in the safe? Five men done that trick!"

"I remember that horrible story," said the girl.

"Well, Pete Burnside was him that went on the trail of that five. The posses couldn't get 'em. The five was too strong for a few men and too fast for a whole mob of hossmen to follow 'em. They'd have got clean away and melted off into the mountains somewheres, if Pete hadn't got onto their trail. Then it was a yarn that would make your hair stand right up on end. Dog-goned if Burnside didn't keep on their heels until he dropped one of 'em. Then the other four found out there was only one man behind 'em, and they turned back and cornered him. They got around him, and then they rushed the pile of boulders where he was lying."

Doc Peters paused and lighted his cigarette.

"Hurry, dad!" cried the girl. "I can't breathe, I'm so excited."

He threw away the match.

"Well, when the smoke cleared away,

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two of 'em was dead, and two of 'em wished that they was dead. But Pete stayed up there and nursed 'em back till they was strong enough to travel. About six weeks later he come down with his two prisoners—yes, sir, he'd stayed up there a whole six weeks with them man-killing hounds!"

"Oh," cried the girl, "how perfectly wonderful, dad!"

"Ain't it?" said Peters. "I tell you, there ain't another man in the mountains that's done the things that Pete Burnside has done. And when he come down with those two gents he'd got so fond of 'em that he went all the way to the governor and come in and sits down, and he tells the governor that these two gents ain't really as bad as the newspapers makes them out, and that, if they get a year in prison and then get pardoned, that he'll go bond that they don't never turn wild again. And will you believe me that old Governor Parks listened to Pete and took his suggestion? Yes, sir. It sure spoke well for Pete, and it spoke well for the governor, too. One year them two was in prison, and then they was turned loose. And ever since then they've just settled down and lived like white folks and ain't give no trouble to nobody!"

"Why, dad," cried the girl, "he's not a man hunter, then. He was a maker of men!"

"Maybe you might call it that," nodded her father. "But, anyway you put it, I'm sure glad to hear that that's Pete Burnside. And I don't care what sort of a man he's turned out to be lately, he's been man enough in the past to suit me. And if he ever comes back to this here ranch he's going to be treated like a king!"

"Yes, yes!" cried the girl. "Oh, dad, he surely deserves everything that good men can do for him!"

Here big Red Stanton, who had listened to the story about Pete Burnside with a restless indifference, now rolled himself about in his chair until it squeaked and groaned in every joint.

"Look here," he said, "I ain't going to have you spoiling him for me!"

The rancher and his daughter looked at the giant, with disgust and some surprise. And in the little silence which spread through the room, they could hear far away a resonant baritone raised in a song which carried far across the night. Perhaps one of the new men in the bunk house was entertaining himself and his companions.

"I ain't going to have you spoil him," continued Red Stanton. "He's no end useful to me. Does all my darning and patching and saddles my hoss for me—and does so many things that I dunno how I'd get along without him! Why, if you started treating him like he was a man, pretty soon *he'd* think that he was a man. And there ain't no sense to that at all! What he's cut out for is to keep me comfortable. And the more comfortabler that I'm kept the quicker I'll get at Joe Daly and his crew. Ain't that good sense and plain sense, Peters?"

The rancher looked upon his guest with a strange eye.

"Maybe you're right," he said, "but there ain't much to worry about yet. There ain't much likelihood that he'll come back."

Red Stanton threw back his head and laughed.

"You dunno him," he declared. "You dunno him, but I do! Oh, he'll come back!"

The two stared at him, utterly fascinated.

"But what makes you think so?" asked the girl. "What could make him come back when he knows——"

"When he knows that he'll get a beating from me so soon as he shows up?"

The lip of Miriam curled with horror and scorn, but she could not answer directly.

"I'll tell you why he'll come back,"

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went on Red, as the singing grew a little louder and a little nearer. "First off, when he gets off by himself with the rustler, he'll begin to think that it's a pretty good thing to be free. But as soon as he runs into somebody that talks loud and has a handy pair of fists, he'll begin to wish that he was back under cover. I dunno how brave he used to be, but I know that I never heard tell of a gent that was half as yaller as he is now. He'll be wishing that he was back where he didn't have nobody to cuss him but some one that he knowed. He'd begin shaking and trembling the way I've seen him do when strangers come around. That's him!"

He laughed again. Miriam dropped her face into her hands.

"What's the matter?" growled Red. "I tell you that he *will* come back, and partly because he'll figure out that if he comes back quick he won't get as bad a licking as he will if he stays away a long time!"

"Let it drop at that," said Peters. "We'll talk some more about him some other time. Who's that, Miriam? You expecting somebody?"

"Yes; Nell Hotchkiss said she might come over for the night——"

She ran to the door nad threw it open. Then she fell back with a shrill, faint cry. As she retreated Pete Burnside stepped forward into the room.

CHAPTER XII.

BURNSIDE IS HIMSELF.

BUT what a different man was this! Pete Burnside seemed a full two inches taller. The sullen droop of his mouth at the corners was gone, and a faint smile played there. His square jaw was thrust out a little more than usual, and the very color of his eyes seemed changed, now that he stood so erect, and no shadow fell from the brows across the pupils. And the bearing of his body, at once erect and easy, made him seem ten years younger and three fold stronger.

Indeed, with all the story which attached itself to his name, and with his hardy appearance, he might have passed for thirty-five years of age; but those who knew declared that he had managed to cram all the events of his life into less than thirty years. He now closed the door carefully behind him and looked about upon those who were in the room. In his left hand he carried a saddlebag which seemed very heavy, and which clinked when it struck against his knee.

"I'm sure sorry that I give you a start," said he to the girl.

"*I'll* be the one that'll change your manners, son!" roared big Red Stanton. He pushed the cuffs of his coat away from his hairy wrists. "And I'll be having a lot to say to you, you gutter rat, you soft-headed fool, turning loose the men that I capture!"

The right hand of Pete Burnside raised, and the forefinger indicated Red Stanton, like the snap and drop of a revolver upon its target.

"You, over yonder," he said, "be quiet. I'll attend to you a little later on."

If he had struck Red over the head with a club and stunned him, he could not have changed the expression on the other's face more completely. With sagging jaw and with mouth agape, the giant leaned forward and stared at him, with dull eyes of wonder. Surprise had utterly unnerved Stanton.

"But I've come to give you my report first," said Pete, turning to the rancher and to Miriam.

Doc Peters was combing his mustache with furious speed, first to one side and then to the other side. Now he seized the hand of Pete and gripped it hard.

"I didn't know you before," he said. "I'd seen pictures of you, too, but I was a fool and didn't recognize you.

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While you were gone, we heard that you're Pete Burnside."

Pete lifted his head and looked across the room at Red Stanton, and the giant blinked stupidly back at him.

"That's my name," he admitted modestly. "And I—I come up here to try to work this here case——"

"That's a lie!" roared Red Stanton. "I had to drag him up here. He sure enough begged me not to take him up into these mountains, where there was so much trouble and——"

"Be quiet!" snapped the rancher, turning suddenly upon Red. And that sudden reproof shocked the giant into another silence.

"I turned that rustler loose," said Pete in his quiet way, "because of me figuring that maybe he'd show me the way to get at Joe Daly. And I was right. He took me all the way up to Joe's camp."

"You don't mean to say——" began the girl.

"What I mean to say," said Pete soberly, "is that there won't be any more trouble from Joe and his crowd."

He turned the saddlebag upside down.

"There's their guns—six guns. There's their wallets—six wallets, I guess. You might take that as a sign that they ain't going to bother you nor nobody else for a while!" And he could not help smiling his triumph into the face of the girl.

"Burnside," said the rancher, "it sort of staggers me. Say it over again. Tell me the straight of it. You mean to say that you got all six of 'em?"

"They pile out the door at me—they stood in the light of the lamp, and as they come out one by one——"

"All lies—all lies!" thundered Red Stanton. He had risen and strode toward them.

"You," called Pete Burnside, "get out and stay gone. You hear me, Red?"

As he spoke he slipped his revolver from its holster and fired. The Colt was jerked from the hip of Red by the tearing impact of the bullet, sent to its mark with an uncanny accuracy. Red's big gun dropped heavily to he floor.

Red, disarmed by miracle, so it seemed, stood wavering an instant. He staggered, his arms stretched out, as though on the verge of lunging either forward or back. And then, clutching at the place where his revolver had been, with a sudden yell of terror he plunged through the door and raced into the night.

Pete Burnside, from the open door, fired into the dirt behind the fugitive. There was a hoarse shriek of fear, and the other bounded out of the lamplight. And so he disappeared swiftly into the blackness, like a nightmare disappearing from a sane mind, it seemed to Pete.

The rancher was laughing uproariously, and Miriam was clinging to his arm and looking out through the door at the renegade; but Pete Burnside did not so much as smile. Indeed, he had lost the habit of smiling forever.

STONES ARE OF PRACTICAL USE TO THE FRUIT GROWER

ALTHOUGH it is commonly thought that stones are a detriment in the garden or orchard, there are circumstances under which they may be of practical help to the fruit grower. Some of the best peach orchards in the country are on stony soil. Their advantage lies in the fact that in a severe drought they can be raked under the trees, where they form a moisture mulch as effective as the more frequently used material, cut grass. The stones will allow moisture to percolate into the soil, yet they will retard its evaporation to a marked degree. The stone mulch is also an effective means for checking the growth of weeds.

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A Horse Who Didn't Forget

BY *Harrison Conrard*

Author of "At Bracket F," "Canadian Hearts," etc.

JULY evenings in the Arizona mountain regions are long enough for a stretch of relaxation after a day's hard grind. The Ringworm boys were lounging on the bench that was strung along the side of the bunk house, when he rode up and swung out of the saddle. They lifted their cigarettes from their lips and suspended their idle whittling to return his greeting, as he removed his war bag and carried it into the bunk house.

You could tell at a glance that he was a veteran of the range. You saw it in his careless swagger and in the way he planted his heel upon the ground. You would have known what he was in the absence of spurs and boots, his four-gallon hat, and his rusty, well-scarred bat-wing chaps. It was indexed in every movement. He was forty, if he was a day, and when you saw those bowlegs of his you got the impression that at least thirty-nine years of his life had been spent in the saddle.

He turned his mild blue eyes upon the group of whittlers and smokers who were observing him with passive interest.

"I'm goin' to abide with you for a spell, gents," he said in a voice that harmonized with the mild tone of his eyes. "My name's Davy Rowland. Jes' drifted in from over in Apache County. So now you know all about me that's wo'th findin' out."

Cal Brewster stretched his long, gangling body languidly and appointed himself spokesman for the Ringworm boys. "We're shore pleased to meet your 'quaintance, Davy," he said with a yawn. "If you ain't hidin' nothin' from us, we bid you welcome. There's plenty o' room for you here in the Hotel de Ringworm. My name's Cal Brewster."

"Pleased to meet you, Cal," said Davy. "I ain't got nothin' to hide from nobody, gents; but you ain't seen all of me yet. There's more acomin', an' when you see it you'll shore set up an' blink some." His eyes scanned the scrub-oak undergrowth and searched up and down among the pines. "'Sheik!'" he called sharply. "Where are you hidin', you dilatory rascal?"

Brewster squinted up at him. "Dog?" came his laconic query.

"Sheik is jes' folks," was Davy's cryptic reply. He puckered his lips and gave a shrill whistle. "Come here, Sheik!" he shouted. "What's keepin' you, boy?"

"Well, by doggies! Now jes' look

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at that, will you?" Brewster jumped up and gaped; likewise the rest of the Ringworm boys.

A burnished-bronze bay gelding had broken through the undergrowth at Davy's call and was romping down toward the bunk house, kicking up his heels and squealing playfully. He flung out his long mane from a proudly arched neck and carried his sweeping tail with the sure poise of an aristocrat.

"Stop, Sheik!" Davy lifted a hand. The horse slid to an abrupt halt a dozen yards from him, lifted his head high, and there stood motionless. "All right, boy! Now come on an' git your cracker."

Sheik pranced forward eagerly. Davy wore a faded old brown coat, and his left hand was thrust down into the pockets. Sheik nuzzled his arm and nipped petulantly at his wrist.

"All right, partner! Now go in an' git it!" Davy chuckled softly.

He lifted his hand from the pocket, and the eager nose promptly penetrated the depths. When it came out a cracker was in the horse's teeth.

"I never play no tricks on him, you see," said Davy quietly. "When I tell him there's a cracker in that pocket, he knows he'll find it."

"Well, by doggies! If that ain't some hoss!" Brewster proclaimed in a burst of admiration.

These men knew horseflesh. They gathered round and gauged the high withers, sloping shoulders, and fine quarters, with appreciative eyes; and then they appraised every inch of the superb creature, from the tip of his nose to the end of his tail.

The straight hind legs—not too straight—tapered gracefully to the almost fragile-looking pasterns that supported the trim and delicately molded hoofs. The neck was long and slender, the head small, the ears, which were set wide apart at their base, thin, pointed, and turned inward at the tips. The nostrils were wide and almost as thin as cardboard. You might have imagined that you could see a roguish twinkle in the mild eyes, which were set wide apart, well down in the forehead. There was grace in every line of the slender body, and you could see the ebb and flow of the fluid thews under the delicate skin.

"I say, what a hoss!" Brewster ran an admiring hand down the thin foreleg. "An' you call him Sheik? What kind of an Injun name is that?"

"'Tain't Injun a-tall," Davy replied. "It's A-rab. A schoolmarm down St. Johns way told me that Sheik is the name of an A-rab feller that's purty high up, so I let her hang the name onto him. There ain't no name too high up for this here hoss."

"He's Arabian?" Brewster straightened up and once more surrendered his eyes to the beauty of the glossy bay. "But shore he's Arabian! Any feller that knows a hoss a-tall wouldn't have to ask that fool question."

"If I told you he's Arabian, you'd have to believe me," Davy said; "for there he is with A-rab stickin' out all over him. But I'll tell you the true facts about him, gents. He ain't Arabian a-tall. He's jes' a funny sort of a throw-back. His dam was a whistlin' steel-dust chestnut sorrel, an' his sire a dapple-gray range critter. There ain't a single mark of neither of 'em about him, 'cept he's got the steel-dust whistle when he gits riled."

Brewster seemed a bit disappointed. "Them things happens 'casional," he said. "Anyhow, he's shore some hoss. Where did you pick him up?"

"Over in the Springerville country," Davy replied with open candor. "I spotted him when he was three weeks old, an' I seen the makin' of a real hoss in him. I bought him an' his mammy for fifty dollars. I turned 'em into the pasture of the outfit I was workin' for, an', o' course, I babied the little rascal

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a lot. I'd had 'em jes' about a week when, one moonlight night, I rides out into the pasture to see how they was comin' on. I heerd a shot an' made a swift ride to'rd the spot where it'd came from. I found Sheik's mammy jes' kickin' her last, while I could hear a hoss a-streakin' for the pasture gate. When I looked, the moonlight was jes' strong enough for me to see that there was a man on its back."

Brewster snorted with indignation. "An' he'd shot the mare?"

"Shore he'd shot the mare! I rid hard to head him off, but he'd gone to Cheyenne. Seein' there was no use tryin' to ketch him, I hurries back, an' there was the pore little orphant a-nosin' his dead mammy the pitifulest you ever seen. That mare was a fightin' fool; so I figured that the feller had tried to git away with the colt, an' the old girl fit him so hard he jes' ups an' kills her. I took the colt up to the ranch house an' raised him on a bottle. I fooled with him a lot, jes' as a feller will that's plumb loco about hosses, an' it didn't take long to learn him to do most everything but talk—an' sometimes he tries all-fired hard to do that."

"Well, by doggies!" Brewster spat it out with the vehemence of indignant profanity. "An' you never ketched the skunk?"

Davy shook his head slowly. "Never ketched him, an' I reckon I don't want to now. Killin' a hoss that a way is nigh on as bad as killin' a man, but time's a wonderful healer, gents, an' I've sort o' half got over it."

"An' you never had no idee who done it?"

"None a-tall; but I'll bet Sheik'd know him if he ever sot eyes on him or heerd his voice. You never seen anything in your life like the memory this critter's got."

The little group of men greeted Davy's confident statement with an incredulous laugh.

"He's forgot all about it by this time," Brewster said wisely. "Hain't no hoss ever lived that'd remember anything that long."

"Ain't they?" Davy arched his brows and gave his shoulders an indulgent shrug. "Anyhow, I'd hate to be the feller that done it, if Sheik ever sots eyes on him."

Brewster gave him a friendly slap on the back. "You're plumb loco, feller. Him only a month-old colt when it happened, an' now comin' on clost to five year old, I'd say! It's out o' reason, feller!"

"How old are you, Sheik?" Davy addressed his question to the horse.

Five times the dainty hoof struck the earth.

"How old will you be five years from now?"

Ten little dust clouds arose from the beat of Sheik's foot, which lifted and fell with calculating precision.

"Well, by doggies!" Brewster gasped.

"He's stringin' you jes' a little," Davy grinned. "He ain't quite five yet. Won't be till next month."

"An' he's never had a saddle on him, or I miss my guess," Brewster commented. "Don't show no marks. Hain't you never broke him yet?"

"Not yet. Never's been a hull on his back, jes' as you say. I'd made up my mind not to step above him till the day he's five. But I calc'late he won't need no breakin' when the time comes to fork him. Here, Sheik, shake hands!"

The right front hoof lifted punctually and rested in Davy's palm.

"Now say your prayers!"

Davy dropped his big hat to the ground. Sheik bent his front knees to it and bowed his head.

"Amen!" said Davy solemnly.

Sheik arose with dignified deliberation.

"Now make your bow to the gentlemen!"

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Sheik stretched a hind foot backward and dropped his head in an awkward curtsy to the delighted audience; then he stood attentive as he awaited his master's wishes.

"Now we've taken our schoolmarm to the grand ball, Sheik! Step out on the floor!"

Davy whistled, and, with eyes twinkling mischievously, Sheik revolved in grotesque cakewalk. The tune changed and he swaggered up and down in a grotesque cakewalk. The tune changed again, and he convulsed his audience with a ludicrous shimmy.

"Good boy, Sheik!" Davy called out. "Now trot up an' git your cracker!"

"Well, by doggies!" Brewster ejaculated, as Sheik pranced up to claim his reward. "I never seen nothin' like that in all my life! I'll say again that he's shore some hoss!"

"You ain't made no mistake there, partner," Davy concurred proudly, as his caressing hand stroked the glossy neck.

"He shore ought to make some track animal," Brewster declared. "He's got more sense than any hoss I ever seen; an' jes' look at them legs! Why, feller, they're made for racin'. Did you ever see anything purtier in your life? All muscle an' nerve, an' I'll bet he's got the wind, too!"

"Yeah, he's all muscle an' nerve," Davy agreed; "an' he's got lots o' gumption to back 'em up. An' he's got marvelenous lungs, too, an' a heart an' speerit to go along with 'em. But he'll never go on the track, gents. Sheik's my pal, an' he's agoin' to keep on continuin' bein' my pal. I ain't never goin' to give him no chanct to git his head all swoll up prancing up an' down in front of a lot o' skirts an' b'iled shirts. He's jes' a-goin' to be Davy Rowland's hoss, that's all, forever an' ever, amen!"

Davy turned his back as he spoke. Sheik stretched his head across his shoulder and rubbed his jowl against the weathered cheek. You might have thought that he understood his master's declaration of affection and was testifying to his own fidelity.

"An' gentle?" Davy supplemented. "Nothin' like him ever walked on four feet, an' I ain't a-goin' to have him sp'iled. He's jes' as gentle as a kitten."

"Sometimes them kittens can be regular bobcats when you come to straddle 'em," Brewster declared. "I'll bet if he ever come unwelded he could pitch John Rogers off the fence."

"Mebby, if somebody else besides myself was fool enough to throw a leg over him; but he'd never make a wiggle with me, feller," Davy asserted with assurance.

"Anyhow," said Brewster, "there's lots o' fellers in these here parts that'd go a long ways to git to fork him. Here comes a feller through the timber right now that'd give his whole string for a chanct to step up on the critter. Riley Beach is plumb loco over forkin' the bad uns."

"Riley Beach?" Davy turned his eyes in the direction which Brewster's gesture had indicated. A bechapped man, a little undersized, was riding toward the group of men at a leisurely gait.

"Yeah, Riley Beach. You'd better whisper to Sheik to chase hisself into the bunk house an' crawl under the blankets," Brewster chuckled. "Don't never let Riley sot eyes on him. He's the locoedest fool over hosses in this here country. He used to work for the Ringworm, but he's got an outfit of his own now. It's growin' real fast, too."

"I used to know Riley over in Apache County," said Davy reminiscently. "I ain't seen him for a long spell, an' I was wonderin' jes' what'd became of him. Used to be consid'able of a broncho peeler when he was over in them parts."

"He's a real un now," Brewster said. "Everybody in Coconino County takes

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his hat off to Riley when it comes to gittin' up on the hurricane deck of a broncho. He makes his brags that he's never been piled yet, an' that there ain't nothin' in the world he can't ride."

Sheik's head was lifted high as the horse held his interested eyes on the approaching rider. His ears wagged forward, then flattened back.

"Hello, Riley!" Davy called out. "Glad to see you!"

"Why, that you, Davy? Where you come from?" Beach returned.

Sheik cocked his ears when he heard that nasal voice.

"Jes' rained in, Riley. Come on over an' say howdy!"

Riley halted suddenly some thirty paces away. He had seen Sheik, and his eyes were popping with wonder and admiration as he gazed in a fixed stare upon the horse.

"Well, say, boy! What a hoss!" he exclaimed.

Sheik jerked his head higher. His upper lip curled to bare his white teeth, and then he broke from the group with an infuriated whistle and charged straight for Beach.

"Stop, Sheik!" Davy shouted; but if Sheik heard he did not heed.

For a scant second Beach stared at the charging bronze-bay fury, as if fascinated. Then he grasped his danger. He dug in his spurs, and his horse leaped out of Sheik's path just in time to escape the savage stroke of those shod hoofs. Beach whirled instantly, with his pistol lifted, as Sheik turned to charge again.

Davy rushed out, shouting and waving his arms wildly. "Stop, Sheik! Stop, Sheik!" he yelled. Sheik heard his master's voice now. He slid to a halt with a snort and an angry whistle.

"Pit that gun up, Riley!" Davy walked over and placed a hand on Sheik's neck. "Do you want me to bounce a malpais off'n your head?" Then he spoke to the horse: "Come on, Sheik!"

Sheik struck the earth savagely with an angry hoof. His eyes, blazing with fury, held in a hot glare upon Riley Beach. His whole body was quivering with rage.

"Here, Sheik, come on, I say!" Davy commanded sharply. "What's got into you, boy?"

Watching Beach out of the corner of his eye, Sheik turned his head slowly; then, with sullen reluctance, he stepped mincingly behind his master across to the little group of gaping men.

Beach's pistol went back into its holster. His hand lifted limply and clung to the horn of his saddle, as his dazed eyes followed Sheik's proud stride.

"What a hoss! What a hoss!" he breathed thickly. "But he's shore some snaky rep-tyle."

He started toward the bunk house, but Davy's lifted hand checked him. "Don't you reckon it'd be safe for you to come nigh him, Riley," he admonished. "He's actin' cantankerous, an' I won't be responsible for what happens if you pit yourself in his way."

"An' that's *yore* hoss?" Beach asked incredulously.

"Shore he's my hoss!"

"Then I'll say you've got some hoss! Purty? Say, boy, but he's purty! But what makes him so hos-tyle?"

"He jes' don't take a shine to you, Riley, that's all. Some hosses is funny critters that a way. I never seen him act jes' like that before, an' I raised him from a colt, too. He's always been as gentle as a horned toad."

"Gentle?" Beach sneered. "He's a cock-eyed rattler, that's what he is; but he's got the makin's of a real hoss if he was in the right hands. Never's had a cack on his back, has he?"

"Not yet," Davy replied. "Nary a leg's ever gone over him in his life."

"I'd give a purty to git to set up on him right now!" Beach said impulsively.

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"You'll never git the chanct, Riley. He's my hoss."

"Ain't goin' to make a cow pony out of him, are you?" Beach queried insolently.

"Wasn't calc'latin'."

Riley nodded. "He's too all-fired purty for the range. If he was mine, I'd train him an' pit him on the circuit. He'd beat the world! Jes' look at them legs, will you? Say, Davy, would you sell him?"

"No!" Davy snapped shortly.

"I'll shet my eyes an' give you a hundred an' a half for him right now!" Beach called out.

Davy returned a contemptuous laugh. "Nothin' doin'! He ain't for sale," he said positively.

"How'd five hundred look to you?" Beach was becoming excited.

"It wouldn't look like nothin' alongside o' this here hoss," Davy sent back. "I told you he ain't for sale, Riley, an' there ain't no more to it. There ain't money enough in all Arizona to buy him. He's my hoss, an' you knowed me long enough over Apache way to savvy what that means."

"He's nothin' but a scrub, nohow you look at him!" Beach jeered spitefully. "An' you won't listen to the jingle o' five hundred cold iron men! Say, Davy, you've been eatin' so much locoed beef you've got the simples. You ought to git somebody to taken a gimlet an' bore a hole in yore head to let 'em out!"

Turning away in disgust, he rode off a short distance. Here he reined in and whirled about to take another look at Sheik. Then he turned again abruptly and galloped away.

Davy Rowland put Sheik and his saddle horse in the Ringworm pasture. Every morning he rode by the gate, and Sheik was as punctual in keeping the daily tryst as was his master.

Riley Beach made frequent trips across to the Ringworm headquarters. Several times he had been seen riding along the pasture fence; and, of course, Davy Rowland heard of these neighborly visits in the exchange of gossip in the dining room and in bunk-house conferences.

One morning, ten days after he had come to the Ringworm outfit, Davy rode up to the pasture gate, as was his custom. Cal Brewster had taken to accompanying him on these visits to Sheik, and the two men exchanged puzzled glances when they halted at the gate.

Sheik was not there to claim his daily cracker and listen to his master's soft cajolery. Davy called and whistled, but no responsive hoofbeats came out of the timber.

A swift scrutiny of the ground about the gate told the story of Sheik's departure. There were the prints of his shod hoofs, and the pawed-up earth was evidence of his stubborn resistance to the rope that had led him away.

"It's taken two of 'em to git away with him!" Davy muttered as he examined the tracks. "An' I reckon I know who done it, Cal. I'm goin' to ride over Riley Beach's way."

"Say, I'll jes' slip along with you, Davy," Brewster said. "By doggies, it's a dirty trick! But you don't want to go an' lose your head. I'll ride over with you to see that you git a square deal."

"Jes' as you feel about it, Cal," Davy said in his mild way. "But you needn't git the trembles account o' me."

A five-mile ride across a stretch of park brought them to Riley Beach's headquarters. A long, low stable stood near the corral, and, as they rode up, they heard loud and excited shouts beyond it.

"I calc'late we got here jes' in time, Cal," Davy said without a quiver. "If you're goin' along, come on!"

He rode around the stable, with Brewster close behind, and drove his horse in a swift gallop toward a group

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of mounted men whom he saw milling around in a wide circle. Sheik was in the middle of the group, and Riley Beach was up in the saddle on his back!

They were a full two hundred yards away, and evidently Beach had just mounted, for Sheik was standing as if in a daze. Then Davy saw him make his curtsy, and immediately he began to waltz. Sheik was bewildered. He did not know just what was expected of him.

Davy shouted lustily as he galloped forward. Then, with a yell, Beach raked Sheik in the shoulder and fanned him down between the ears with his big hat.

Sheik understood then. All the fury in that shining bronze-bay hide awoke in a flash. With a snort and a defiant whistle he whirled about dizzily and then went into the air. He came down on stiffened legs, with all four feet spread wide; hardly had they touched the earth when he bounded up again like a rubber ball. This time his head lowered in the drop back to the ground, and all four feet were so close together when he lit that a span of the hand would have compassed the prints of his hoofs.

Davy saw that he was too late now. He reined in when he reached the circle, and a malicious grin wrinkled his mild countenance as he tried to follow the cyclonic performance that ensued.

"Jes' look at him weave! Oh, boy, jes' look at the baby weave!" Brewster screeched in a hysteria of delight as he reined in beside Davy.

Motionless, Davy sat in his saddle, exulting in Sheik's prowess. He was wrathful, but his rage was tempered by his frank admiration for Riley Beach's superb horsemanship. Never before had he seen such pitching, and he had never seen such riding.

Sheik was like lightning in his swift transitions from one canny equine maneuver to another; but still Riley Beach sat close in the saddle, confidently, almost arrogantly, anticipating every movement beneath him and yielding his body punctually to every quiver of those volatile muscles.

Beach let out a yell and reached forward and fanned Sheik on the nose. This was too much for the sensitive creature. His aristocratic pride was outraged. With a squeal and a whistle he began to spin like a top. He gyrated and spiraled. Suddenly he planted his forefeet firmly on the ground, stopped abruptly, and side-swiped so wickedly that, if Riley Beach had been an ordinary rider, his brains would have been scrambled.

Then he went up into the air, and, just as his feet touched earth again, he skinned back with such violence that Beach was jerked forward until the saddle horn gouged into his stomach. Beach grunted and for a moment wavered.

At this instant Sheik must have remembered some of his master's training. He skinned back and shimmied in the same movement. Beach's head began to snap. You could see that Sheik's sensitive nerves were recording the effect of the subterfuge. With a trumpeting whistle he spun into more violent agitation. Every muscle rippled and snapped; every fiber of that intricate arrangement of nerves was attuned to transmit to his sensitive brain the slightest jarring discord in the rhythm of that flexible thing above him.

Forward and back Sheik skinned, with head-snapping jerks, while simultaneously the lateral movement increased in violence. The giddy complex convulsions seemed to radiate in centrifugal waves in all directions from a common focus within that agitated body.

Beach's head began to revolve like the governor on an engine. Then it popped back and forth, as though it must snap from his body. Daylight

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streaked under him. He wabbled and began to slide. His big hat flew from his arrogant hand, and then, for the first time in his life, he reached for leather!

"Sheik'll pile him in about two seconds, I calc'late," Davy ruminated.

The horse realized that the crucial moment had come. He made a wicked lunge, side-swiped, and then skinned back so suddenly and viciously that even Davy Rowland gasped. It was too much for Riley Beach. He catapulted through space and crashed down on the flat of his back a dozen feet beyond Sheik's nose.

With a triumphant whistle Sheik pranced away. Beach did not move for a second or two; then he rolled over with a groan, sat up, rubbed his eyes, and blinked about him foolishly. Sheik came to an abrupt halt, as though he had forgotten something. He whirled about and glared at his victim for a moment. Then with a defiant whistle he rose and stood on his hind legs.

"Stop, Sheik!" Davy shouted; but Sheik did not hear him. He dropped to all fours, lowered his head, and with a squeal started for Riley Beach.

"Stop, Sheik!" Davy's voice broke into a screech as he spurred to intercept the infuriated creature.

Riley Beach saw what was coming. He threw himself flat on his stomach and clasped his hands behind his head to shield himself from the murderous beat of those savage hoofs.

"Stop, Sheik!"

Then Sheik recognized his master's voice. He planted his hoofs firmly in the ground and slid to a halt within a foot of the cowering man.

"Come here, Sheik!" Davy called.

Davy rode up and threw himself from the saddle. His hand went into his coat pocket and came out with a cracker.

"You've earned it, boy!" Davy complimented him.

With a low whinny Sheik turned his head and accepted the tribute.

Davy turned to Beach. "Are you hurt much?" he asked, as Sheik nuzzled his hand.

"He jes' piled me, that's all!" Beach replied with a sullen oath. "What's the matter with the rep-tyle—anyway? He's been actin' like he wants to kill me."

"He'd kill you right now if I turned my back on him," Davy said in his soft, easy voice. "He's never forgot the night you killed his mammy, Riley."

Beach's sullen gaze dropped to the ground. "I never killed his mammy!" he replied sullenly.

"I calc'late Sheik ain't made no mistake," said Davy in his quiet way. "He's got the greatest memory of any hoss I ever seen. He never forgits nothin'. You killed his mammy when he was a little feller, jes' because she fit you to keep you from gittin' away with him. I'd have caught you shore, if you hadn't had a faster hoss'n me, but I was real glad afterward that you got away. Are you goin' to own up to it, Riley? Or are you figurin' on me turnin' my back an' lettin' Sheik take it out of you for murderin' his mammy?"

"How much was the old critter wo'th?" Beach half whimpered.

Davy lifted the saddle from Sheik's back and threw it on the ground.

"You ain't got money enough to pay for her, Riley," he said as he removed the hackamore and dropped it on the saddle. Then he swung up on his horse's back. "No man's got money enough to pay for any hoss o' mine that he kills in cold blood. You know what a hoss means to me, Riley Beach; so don't you never kill another'n. An' as for Sheik, don't you never dare sot eyes on him again. That's all." He turned to Sheik. "All right, partner! Let's go!"

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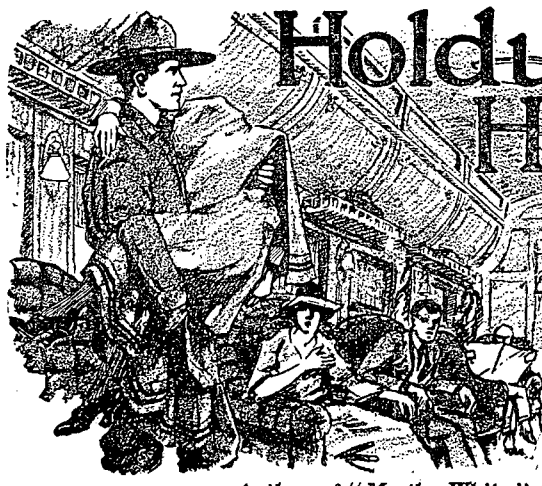

Holdup Men Have Families, Too

by

Hugh F. Grinstead

Author of "Mostly White," "Vice Versa," etc.

ON the platform between the smoker and the chair car "Tip" Rogers paused and tentatively reached a hand upward to the cord that connected with the emergency brake. He didn't pull the cord; he was only measuring the distance for future operations. He stood for a moment watching the bare hills flash by in the early dusk; then he entered the smoking car. The porter was just lighting the lamps, and the conductor was half way down the aisle on his tour of ticket-punching after leaving the last station.

No, Tip was not a brakeman; a casual observer would have known from his walk and the peculiar bow of his legs that he would have been more at home astride a horse than walking the aisle of a moving car. Indeed, it might well have been said that he was a sworn enemy of the railroad and express companies.

With a furtive glance at the passengers as he passed, Tip slowly walked the length of the car. He handed his bit of pasteboard to the man with the ticket punch as he passed him, and took a seat near the front end. The ticket to the next regular stop had cost Tip two perfectly good dollars, for stations were far between in this wide region, which had not yet been invaded by the "dry farmer." But the purchase of that ticket had been in the nature of an investment, and it was not beyond reason to hope that each of the dollars staked might gather thousands of its kind into the ready hand of the investor.

Tip sat still for five minutes; then he got up and walked back the way he had come. He could now look every passenger in the face, and before he reached the door he had recognized at least three of them. The recognition was not mutual, however, for when Tip had looked at them on a previous occasion it had been through two eyeholes cut in a red bandanna.

As he glanced casually in the direction of each man, he made a mental tabulation of the individual. There was the fat drummer who had been a victim of the holdup on the Santa Fe two weeks before; he was labeled "easy," while the tall man who had attempted to draw a gun on the same occasion came in for a different classification. Taking them all in all, Tip found the car filled with average citizens, the kind who would rather lose the few valuables they carried than endanger their lives by need-

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less resistance. Let the railroad and express companies protect their own property, was their attitude.

When Tip again crossed the platform between the two cars, the train was just entering Tamarack Gorge. It was thirty miles to the next regular stop, with only one flag station between, and a man traveling by horse in that region might ride for half a day without coming in sight of a house. But Tip would be at home here. He knew every ranch house and miner's shack within twenty miles and could easily find them or avoid them as the circumstances demanded.

As might be guessed, Tip was the advance agent, so to speak, of a band of train robbers. There were only four of them, and they had operated with such ease and success on three previous jobs that they determined to vary the monotony somewhat. Also, the railroad company had threatened to put guards on their trains in that section, and it was well enough to get a little inside information before pulling off something that might prove disastrous to the perpetrators.

Granite Gap, a narrow defile in the mountains, had been fixed upon as the best spot on the road for a holdup, and, since suspicious engineers had a way of ignoring lanterns swinging across the track at night, the most logical course would be to have the train stopped by some one on board. Tip was to do this by pulling the cord of the emergency brake at the proper time. Before that he was to make sure the train was not filled with armed guards. His three companions were to be on hand when the train stopped.

Tip hesitated a moment before entering the chair car. Half of its occupants were women, and he had never been able to overcome a natural shyness when in the presence of the average member of the opposite sex. At times this shyness bordered on distrust, for in an indirect way a woman was responsible for his present occupation. Until a few months before he had been a law-abiding cowpuncher, but the strain of domestic difficulties called for some overshadowing excitement, and he had been finding it in large doses. Somewhere in the world Tip had a girl-wife whom he could not wholly forget, in spite of their differences.

As Tip entered the coach, he was immediately aware of an unusual commotion about half way down the aisle. A knot of excited men and women were gathered about a woman reclining limply in her seat. Apparently, the woman had fainted, and those gathered around were making fruitless efforts to revive her. The door at the far end of the car opened, and a man past middle age, with a professional air about him, bustled in from the Pullman. He was a physician, judging from the manner with which he took charge of the case and summarily dismissed the solicitous helpers, with the exception of one woman.

Tip stopped and regarded the scene from afar. Here, indeed, was a pretty kettle of fish—a sick woman in the way with a holdup staged to come off within fifteen or twenty minutes at most. It was just like a woman, he reflected, to pick the most inopportune times for fainting. He had foreseen and guarded against other contingencies that might arise, but nothing like this had occurred to him. True, the woman might recover within the next few minutes, but the excitement that was due, would like as not throw her into another fainting spell, and it made Tip nervous to see a woman faint. There were some places where even a highwayman must draw the line, and from Tip's point of view the sick must be spared.

He debated the question in his mind for a few minutes. There would be fat pocketbooks among the passengers, both male and female, but if the woman persisted in remaining in a faint he must eliminate the chair car entirely. There

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would still be the express and mail cars, as well as the occupants of the smoker. Even the Pullman would not be immune.

Tip was on the point of retreating to the platform to remain until the woman had recovered, when he reconsidered and decided that he had best go on through to the rear platform and complete his rounds. There would be little time to waste. Squeamish as he was abount fainty women, he started down the aisle. He reached the middle of the car and waited for the doctor, who appeared to be in no hurry, to dispose his bulk so that others might pass. When the medical man at last raised from his hasty examination of the patient, he whirled about and confronted the startled Tip.

"Here, young man," the old doctor gruffly demanded, "take hold and lift this woman while I place these cushions so as to make her more comfortable." Tip made as if to pass on without heeding, but the doctor was persistent. "Take right hold there. You're about the huskieest man I see, and she is light as a feather—starved, actually starved; that's what's the matter with her."

Knowing that obstinate refusal to do what the doctor had so peremptorily requested, would attract more undesired attention than would compliance, Tip reached down with his arms and awkwardly grasped the reclining figure without so much as a glance at her face. In fact, he turned his head to keep from beholding the deathly pallor he knew must be there. He held her loosely, impatient to be on his way, while the doctor and a kind-hearted woman in the next seat fussed with the cushions. Tip marveled at the lightness of his burden, hardly as much as a slip of a girl should weigh.

"Starving, both of them. Some man is responsible for this—some trifling scoundrel," the doctor grumbled with a comprehensive gesture that took in a weakly fretting bundle laying on the seat next to the window. "The woman has starved herself in order to buy milk for the child, and now both of them are on the downhill move. If I could just lay my hands on that man——"

The blanket and cushions being finally arranged, Tip, eager to be on his way, hastily deposited his burden. As he laid the unconscious woman on the seat, some object that had been tightly clutched in her hand dropped to the floor and rolled half way across the aisle. Tip stooped to pick it up, and the next instant he held in his hand a small, circular picture-mounting little larger than a silver dollar. When he turned it over, he looked at the familiar photographic image of a young man—apparently two or three years younger than Tip himself—with an engaging smile and an open countenance.

Unobserved, Tip guiltily dropped the little picture into his coat pocket, and without risking a glance in the direction of the woman he had so recently held in his arms, he made a dash for the rear door. A dozen steps, and he slowed down, then halted. His mind had worked faster than his legs. Slowly, he turned in his tracks and walked back until he was again near the middle of the car. He was near enough to hear what the doctor was saying to some of the passengers, and stopped to listen.

"She'll just stay that way until she gets nourishment of some kind," the doctor was saying. "She may revive for a few minutes, just to swoon again. What they both need is plenty of warm milk right now. If there was just a dining car on this train! It may be hours yet before we reach a place where the proper food and attention can be obtained, and by that time——"

Tip didn't wait to hear more. He stuck his head out the nearest window and peered into the darkness ahead. Presently the engineer blew the whistle for one of the infrequent grade cross-

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ings, and for a moment lights twinkled in a house half a mile ahead and not far from the track. That was Gilson's ranch, and two miles farther on would be Granite Gap and the waiting holdup men.

Tip swung back into the aisle and stood for a moment. He reached up deliberately and grasped the cord over his head. He pulled it vigorously, and there came immediately the answering hiss of air and the screech of quickly applied brakes. The heavy train rumbled and jarred for five hundred yards or more before it finally came to a stop.

The irate conductor was bearing down upon the stalwart figure in the aisle; the roughly shaken passengers, some of whom had been dozing, sat up quickly or thrust heads out of the windows. Tip himself stood unabashed, with a quizzical smile ready to break into a grin.

"Here, young fellow," the angry trainman shouted as he approached, "who's runnin' this train, me or you? When I want this train stopped, I'll attend to it myself. I'm of a good notion to put you off right here."

"It ain't needful," Tip drawled. "I'm a-goin' to git off myself. You might use some o' that wind you're wastin' to help me off, though. Your old sign up there says to pull that rope in case of accident, an' I reckon they has been a accident, so what you chawin' the rag about?"

"That's Gilson's ranch out there where you see the light," Tip went on, addressing the old doctor this time. "They ain't no better nurse nowheres than Mis' Gilson, an' they's got plenty o' milk. Reckon if some of you'll bring the kid, I can manage this little woman without no trouble to speak of."

Again he took the unconscious burden in his arms, this time tenderly, and stepped out upon the platform. A lady passenger followed with the baby, while the porter stumbled along in the dark with the baggage. It was a good hundred yards to the ranch house, but not once did Tip release his burden until he laid her carefully on Mrs. Gilson's bed. The obliging lady passenger returned to the train with the porter to continue her journey, but Tip stayed on to help the rancher's wife feed warm milk, a sip at a time, to the famished child and its exhausted mother.

When Tip had finally been forced to look squarely upon the pinched face of the woman, an uncomfortable lump formed in his throat, and he was forcibly reminded of the old doctor's opinion of the man who had caused her suffering.

It was near midnight when the woman on the bed—she was really little more than a girl—regained complete consciousness and sufficient strength to talk. When she opened her eyes, she stared uncomprehendingly at Mrs. Gilson; then her glance fell upon Tip, standing awkwardly by the bed.

"Tip—Tip," she whispered with manifest awe. "Oh, I know it's all a dream, but don't wake me. I want it to last—I want to see Tip again. Did I die and go to heaven like I——"

Her voice trailed off, and her eyes closed for a few minutes. When she opened them again, Tip was down on his knees by the side of the bed, one arm around his wife.

"No, Margie, it ain't no dream," he blurted huskily. "I reckon I been a plumb ornery skunk to be so contrary after that row with your folks when we came back and told 'em as we run away and got married. I didn't know——"

Her thin white hand was over his mouth. "Hush, Tip; it wasn't your fault. I didn't want to stay home like I ought to, and I knew I could make my own living and have things I wanted. It was easy until the baby—our baby—came, then they wouldn't let me work there any longer. I was coming back

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to you, when everything went black, and I didn't remember anything more. I was looking at your picture, trying to tell you that I was coming back to stay with you always and always. You want me, don't you, Tip?"

The answer was a convulsive pressure of his arms. She was snuggling against his shirt front.

"Tip."

"Uh-huh."

"Look at him. His eyes are just like yours, and his chin, too. He's just as cute as can be."

Tip shyly raised a corner of the blanket and took his first peep at the sleeping infant; his boy!

"Tip, it's lucky you were on that train. I wonder why? You haven't been gambling again, have you?"

"Yep, a little," Tip admitted. "A two-dollar throw it was, an' I won the whole world the first rattle. Reckon it was about the best investment I ever made. But I'm shore glad I didn't stay on that train no longer than I did; I might 'a' lost the very next throw. Yes, I reckon I'm a lucky cuss."

THE CATTALO, A NEW TYPE OF ANIMAL

SO long ago as 1885, various men experimented with the possibilities of a new type of animal to be obtained from mating buffalo and domestic cattle, a type which should combine the beef qualities of cattle with the hardiness and winter-ranging ability of the buffalo. Not much progress was made with these experiments until the late Mossom Boyd, of Bobcaygeon, Ontario, Canada, began his work in 1894. Boyd succeeded in building up a herd of different types of a new race of animals by mating a pure buffalo bull with domestic cows of various breeds.

At the time of his death, in 1895, the Canadian department of agriculture purchased from his estate twenty head of hybrids and cattalos. These animals were taken to Wainright Park, Alberta, and placed in an inclosure adjoining the buffalo range. Tests were immediately began to discover the animals' ability to range unassisted outdoors through the hard winters of this region.

The hybrid, a half buffalo, half domestic cow, shorthorn, Angus, or Hereford stock, has proved the best for crossing. Cattalos are the offspring of two hybrid animals of these new types, and they have a great many points which make them valuable animals. The hides are of fine texture, combining beauty with serviceability. Their fur coats sell from $50 to $100, according to size and condition.

According to Mr. Maxwell Graham, director of park animals, who has an expert's knowledge of breeding animals, both the hybrids and the cattalos are equal to the buffalo in the matter of ruggedness. They do not drift like range cattle before a storm, and they are not susceptible to disease. In the matter of rustling they are equal to the buffalo, and comparatively poor pasture is sufficient to maintain them. They thrive on the Alberta plain without shelter.

In a recent poor grazing year, a test showed that the hybrids and cattalos were in much better flesh than domestic cattle foraging on the same range. Recently, the Dominion government's experiments have gone a step further. An odd alien animal, a yak bull, has been imported from Central Asia. The yak is the zoölogical connecting link between the buffalo and domestic cattle. It mates readily with cattle, and it will mate with the buffalo and the buffalo hybrids. From these experiments further types are expected to originate.

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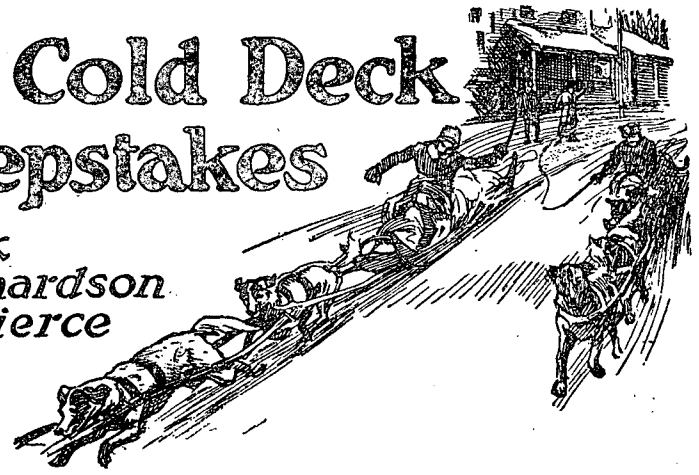
The Cold Deck Sweepstakes



By Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "Bingo Pays His Way," "Not a Bad Idea," etc.

GIMME the key, Flapjack. We want to look 'em over. It's getting about that time of the year, you know." One of Cold Deck's leading citizens, followed by several others, stood hopefully before "Flapjack" Meehan.

"I won't give you the key," replied Flapjack with a grin, "because I want to look 'em over myself."

The same request with the same reply had been frequent during the past few days. Flapjack tucked the all-important key into his pocket and headed up the street a half block to the comfortable kennels that housed the Meehan-Willows dog teams. While unlocking the door, another man suddenly donned a parka and was across the street before the last of Flapjack's little party had entered. "Hello, Meehan!" he said too breezily to suit Flapjack. "Don't mind if I look your dogs over, do you?"

"It's all right with me, Walden," answered Flapjack politely.

The men, experienced sour doughs all, inspected the dogs with interest; particularly so did Walden. "A fine team, Meehan," he said, "a fine team!" He appeared to have more to say, but suddenly changed his mind. It struck Flapjack as being queer. He had no reason in the world for disliking the man, and yet from the day that Walden and his partner, Nixon, appeared in Cold Deck, both Flapjack and "Tubby" had instinctively disliked the men. They did not have the even, frank way of looking into a man's eyes that men of open places expect of those they meet

Walden thanked Flapjack and returned to his cabin, the others accompanied Flapjack back to the New Deal Café, discussing the greatest sporting event that can take place in an Alaskan community—a dog-team race.

Men who could afford it spent real money in the development of a winning team. Flapjack had won the two previous years. This year it was agreed that "Tubby" Willows should have the honor of driving a winning team. It was taken for granted that the Meehan-Willows team would win, though several teams had been developed that bade fair to crowd them for first honors. No less than eighty-six dogs had at one time or another been seriously considered by Flapjack and Tubby, had been fed, trained, and tried out. Merit alone counted, and when, by elimination, the team of seven dogs leaped into the har-

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ness, eager for the race, they were the cream of the eighty-six. No better all-around dog team trod Northern trails than this aggregation of powerful Malemutes.

The first prize of one thousand dollars meant little to Flapjack and Tubby. They had donated a good share of the purse and had spent more than the thousand in preparation for the event held a year ago. They would spend as much this year. It was the thrill of the contest, the glory of keen competition, the excitement of the finish, the sport of winning, that intrigued the partners. Bets would run high, money change hands, sporting blood would run hot, but the monotony of the long winter would be broken, and the community would be better for it. And so it was that men said: "It's getting about that time. Let's go over and take a look at Flapjack and Tubby's team."

Walden's interest seemed casual enough, yet the moment he reached his cabin his manner changed. He became excited. "Well, I got a look at their team," he informed his partner, "and I know dogs when I see 'em. Meehan's team is big, powerful, the sort that can drag a sled day after day over hard going and stand the gaff; but they're not so good on short dashes, though somehow I've a hunch he has bred speed as well as strength."

"You don't want to forget," warned Nixon, "that freak teams don't go in these races. The rules and regulations provide only for teams used in trail work in the North. That means a team that can plug along and do a day's work in a day, the sort of team Meehan has developed, the sort of teams the other fellows enter."

"You don't know what you're talking about," retorted Walden. "I've looked up the original rules governing the Cold Deck Sweepstakes, and nothing is said about teams other than that the same dogs and driver must complete the run to win. It's permissable to run any kind of team."

"Yes, but a custom has grown up that bars unusual teams," insisted Nixon. "However, in the show-down, the rules govern, and custom don't count; we'll cover every bit of money that says the Meehan-Willows dogs win."

Tubby Willows harbored a secret fear, a dark shadow that hovered over him, or, more properly, about him—his own shadow. He was perpetually afraid it would grow larger, and he preferred that his shadow grow smaller. Thus it was he combated the tendency to overweight incessantly, and this despite the fact that his weight had been the same, within a few pounds, for the past fifteen years.

On this brisk winter morn he donned skis and went swinging over the lowlands with skill that comes only with years of practical use. Despite other methods of winter travel, Tubby used skis whenever possible. A gentle slope, followed by a steeper pitch, loomed up before him, and he grinned.

"My peculiar style of beauty and ski jumping don't go well together," he commented aloud, "but here goes for that jump. For the last three I've gone head over heels when I hit. My take-off is perfect, but when I land—— If I live long enough, I'll do it yet."

He shot downward with swiftly increasing speed. The take-off loomed up, and he was in mid-air almost before he knew it; the points of his skis crossed, his eyes bulged for one feverish moment; then by a miracle he uncrossed his skis, struck the smooth expanse, and glided swiftly for a quarter of a mile, when he stopped.

"Made it, by gosh!" he exclaimed, and chuckled. "But what was that I saw under me when I shot through the air over the trail? Dogs, but not Malemutes. Huh!"

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Here was food for thought, because when a musher took that trail he was usually loaded and needed a heavy team. And the team he glimpsed was light, but swift; the sled—— Yes, the sled was anything but regulation. Tubby worked swiftly from that moment, toiling his way up the next ridge, then rushing swiftly downward, darting through the most precarious going imaginable, until at last he halted. The brush behind covered up his track from any one passing along the trail. The sight that greeted him a moment later moved him to admiration.

"Those dogs can travel, I'm here to tell you," he remarked to the surrounding brush. "Part collie and part something else. Walden is driving, and that sled is a sled and nothing more. Don't know what their game is, but they intend to enter that team in the Sweepstakes."

On the return to camp, Tubby had plenty of time to ponder on this new angle of the coming event. No one around Cold Deck had seen this mysterious team, so it was obvious it was being quartered and worked at some abandoned cabin away from prying eyes. "Flapjack, how much had we better spend on the race?" he queried by way of opening conversation on his return.

"Enough to win it, but it won't take much. Our team is stronger and swifter than ever this year," Flapjack replied. "I was out warming them up this morning. They are full of life and ready for a fight or a frolic."

"Good news," replied Tubby, "but not good enough!"

Flapjack lifted his eyebrows. "What's up?"

"Something. Just how much, I don't know, but I passed over the goingest bunch of dogs you ever saw this morning, and for a wonder I didn't fall, but made it to the next bend ahead of 'em and watched 'em pass. Walden was driving."

"That bird, eh? I've looked him up. He and his pardner are the kind that always live on the fat of the land. They've mined a little, run stores here and there, never staying long in a place, so it don't look so good for them. They've got plenty of money, too." Being a trustee in the bank, Flapjack had the inside "dope" on the financial standing of most men in the community.

"Whatever it is, we must be ready for them," agreed Tubby after further conversation, "and so I guess I'll tell 'Rough' Rhodes to come on over."

Flapjack nodded and, while Tubby was gone, opened their safe and removed therefrom a sheaf of bills. Rhodes entered the "calf" several minutes later. He remained within a half hour, then emerged walking briskly, the bills tucked in his pocket. His manner indicated he had important business on his mind. Several days went by before the discovery was made that 'Rough' Rhodes to come on over."
usual haunts.

"Told me he expected to go away on business," said Flapjack in answer to questions, "and Rhodes never was a man to tell the world what was on his mind."

Whatever it was must have been both important and detaining, for, as the day of the race approached, he was still absent, and it was an unheard-of thing for Rhodes to miss a race.

"Chuck" Edwards, Cold Deck's official town cut-up and sport, wore a worried look as he entered the New Deal Café. It was two days before the race. "Where's Tubby?"

"Away on business!" explained Flapjack.

"Hang it all," growled Edwards, "it seems like everybody is away on business. I've been waiting for Rough Rhodes to show up, and he's away. Now Tubby's away."

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"Can I do something for you?" offered Flapjack.

"Yes. Tell me why it is there's so much money offered that the Meehan-Willows entry won't win the Sweepstakes. You expect to win, don't you, Flapjack?"

"Sure!"

"It's a good bet?"

"Sure!"

"Then I'll go the limit?"

"Sure!"

"Say," wrathfully, "can't you say anything but 'sure?'"

"Sure!"

"Then say it!"

"Rough Rhodes is right over there eating."

Edwards wheeled. "Where you been?" he asked Rhodes.

"Away on business!"

"It's a good thing I can't whip you, or I'd give you a thrashing for that answer. Where'd you go?"

"I'm like Tubby. I thought I was getting fat, so I mushed a little bit and worked it off. Now don't ask me any more questions."

"Who you betting on?" demanded Edwards, ignoring the order.

"Meehan-Willows entry!"

"Good. I don't care if you never speak to me again. I'm going down the line on that entry." Chuck made a bee line for Walden's cabin. "I'll cover that five hundred you offered," he said briskly.

"Fine! If you get any more——"

Chuck shook his head. "I'll either bum my grub for the rest of the winter, or live high. It won't make much difference which, because I get a great kick out of life just living."

On the morning of the great race, Rough Rhodes was on hand early. He had to be, because he was master of ceremonies. At the start and finish, an imaginary line in front of the New Deal Café, a crowd was gathering. Luck was smiling down, the air clear and crisp; the going would be fast outside of camp. Several stakeholders were gathered in a group discussing the air of mystery that hovered over the event when Walden approached. "I've got a thousand dollars to bet, even money, that our entry wins," he said quietly. The silence was significant. Heretofore, the bets were against the Meehan-Willows entry; now they were coming into the open and specifying their own team. The odor of the well-known rodent was on the air, and the crowd was sniffing. Walden became impatient. "Come," he insisted. "Where are all the sports this camp is supposed to contain? What's the matter with you, Meehan? Afraid of losing your money? Afraid to back your own entry?"

Flapjack looked him squarely in the eyes. "If that's a bluff, Walden, I'm calling it right now. I don't want to be too hard on you, wise old bird"—the sarcasm was gentle and therefore lost—"but I back my team when I enter it."

Walden took a second glance at the Malemutes. "I'm still waiting for the thousand to be covered," he taunted.

Flapjack handed his roll to Rough Rhodes. "There she is, all covered," he said. "When the race is over, Rhodes, take the two thousand dollars and give it to the Cold Deck Hospital to be used on miners that are sick and busted. I don't need it."

Walden glanced sharply at Meehan. "If that's a hint for me to become charitable in my old age, Meehan, forget it. If I win, it goes into my jeans; I've all I can do to take care of myself."

"Quite true," agreed Flapjack, "if you win."

Several entries came up to the start, eager for the fray to the point they were ready to match fangs with the nearest rival team. Whips cracked, and

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a few lusty kicks were necessary to maintain order.

A half block away, a team rounded the corner and trotted down to the start. Nixon was driving, but upon arrival Walden took charge. The crowd gasped in amazement as several hundred pairs of eyes wandered from the swift-appearing team to the small sled it was dragging; then amazement gave way to a murmur of protest.

"That stuff don't go!" cried a voice.

"You bet it don't!" said another. "It's against the rules. Are you going to stand for it, Flapjack? It's against the spirit of the thing, too."

"Get the rules!" said Walden confidently. "We looked up the rules before selecting our entry. Be sports, gentlemen. Our team is swifter, but Meehan's team is stronger. Strength may win, and, again, speed may win."

"You don't think so, by the way you've been betting!" shouted some one.

By this time some one had handed Rough Rhodes the rules. In a deep, sing-song voice he read each paragraph. "It's against the spirit of the thing, all right," he explained, "but it's certainly not against the rules. Walden's team can enter."

The resentful mood of the crowd vanished as suddenly as it had appeared. Somebody gave vent to a cheer, and it was taken up by others; then Tubby Willows, driving a strange team of dogs and a sled that matched Walden's, appeared. Tubby pulled up to the start as casually as though he were driving his own Malemutes instead of a crack aggregation of Llewellyn setters. And such a team as it was. Rough Rhodes had driven them several hundred miles in easy stages by way of training, and they were ready to go.

"Now what do you think of that, Walden?" shouted somebody. "Beat at your own game! From the look on your face, you must have a strange presentiment you're in for a hard winter."

"Heh! heh!" chuckled "Dad" Simms, who had left his place beside the stove to see the fun. "Makes me think of the winter Flapjack ran a fast mail, using setters instead of Malemutes."

The lines about Walden's mouth hardened. Just what he was thinking doubtless was not fit for publication. The very rules he had so carefully studied—then violated the spirit of the contest by relying on them—now stood fair to defeat him. No chance to call off bets now. He was in to the hilt and must make the best of it.

Rough Rhodes interrupted his thoughts, and a moment later they were off. His team took the lead, with Tubby bringing up the rear. Several Malemutes were between them. The crowd watched them from view, then scattered until they again approached, which would be from the opposite direction, after swinging around the back country for several miles. Three laps constituted the course.

A dark line moving swiftly over a snowy ridge, then down toward camp, brought them out again. Walden was leading by a neat margin; then came Tubby's setters, following by a period of several minutes before the first Malemute team came in sight.

Tubby winked solemnly at Flapjack as he passed. On the back stretch he had learned he could pass Walden whenever he felt like it, unless the man resorted to crooked work, and Tubby was mighty watchful. Walden flashed through camp a minute ahead of Tubby on the second lap, and Nixon's heart took hope. The setters weren't standing the pace. Walden's team was.

As Tubby topped the ridge, he squared off for the finish. "Come on, boys!" he cried. "They timed Walden from the moment he appeared on the ridge until he reached camp, and they'll be timing us. Show 'em what you can

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do." He cracked the whip in the air high above them, and response was instantaneous. Down the hill and into town they sped, around a corner and——

The lead dog swerved sharply. Some one shouted a warning, and an instant later the team had hit a waiter bearing a tray of food from a restaurant to a cabin across the way. Food filled the air, there was a clatter of silverware, and the team sped on, leaving destruction in its wake. Slowly the waiter got to his feet.

"Kick that grub under the snow," yelled a man, "or those Malemutes will want to stop and eat! Here they come!"

The Malemutes were coming strongly, but were steadily losing. Instead, it was a race among themselves, and a good one.

A minute behind Walden, Tubby swung into the last lap, and a few yards beyond he passed Flapjack.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the latter; then his eyes narrowed. "Crooked work!"

It couldn't have been Walden, because he was too busy with his own affairs in maintaining the lead. Blood was streaming down Tubby's face, but he was sticking to the race gamely. Flapjack watched him a moment, then leaped for his own team.

"I'm going to stop it!" he shouted. "What's a race compared with a pardner like Tubby? He's sticking to it because he's not a quitter, and he's badly wounded. I'm going to pull him out; then I'm going to hunt down the hound that did it."

Grimly shifting his gun into position, Flapjack was off, his Malemutes racing as never before in an effort to overtake Tubby. Twice he caught a glimpse of him on long stretches; then he saw him no more. It was an exhibition of gameness that thrilled Flapjack to the core—Tubby bleeding, but sticking to it because it was not allowed to change drivers.

A movement in the brush caught his ear. He swung quickly in time to see a startled Siwash duck. "Stick 'em up!" he ordered roughly. "You yellow dog! So that's the way of it? Took a shot at Tubby just because he run you in last month for beating your squaw, eh? Well, my fine buck, you're headed for McNeil's Island right now. Get them mangy curs of yours and head back on the trail. Shut up! Mush! I want to see the finish."

While the racing teams were swinging around, Flapjack cut across, pausing just long enough to thrust the Siwash into jail. The crowd was cheering as he joined it. Neck and neck, the two teams came over the ridge; neck and neck, they dropped down and vanished behind the nearest cabins. Up the street men were yelling frantically, while the crowd at the finish blocked the path as it watched the corner around which a setter's or a collie's nose would appear. Which would it be? An eternity—then, running low, swinging wide, came the setters, and, fifteen feet behind, the collies. "Stand back! Stand back! Give 'em a chance!" roared Rhodes.

The crowd parted, and Tubby Willows flashed across the finish, reeling, his eyes shielded by his arm. Flapjack grasped him. "Tubby, old man!" he cried, and an instant later he was flung back.

"Grab him, fellows!" he said in a low tone. "He's out of his head! Don't hurt him."

They grasped him, gently at first, then as firmly as he flung them back with the fury of a madman. Once free, he raced down the street. Flapjack and Rough Rhodes downed him. "Calm down, old fellow!" pleaded Flapjack. "Take it easy, now. You're hurt! You're all over blood."

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Again Tubby flung them aside. "Blood! Blood!" he screamed. "You blamed idiots! That ain't blood, that's catsup; and it's been in my eyes ever since I hit that infernal waiter on the last lap. Leave me alone till I get it out."

"It ain't blood?" gasped out Flapjack. "Why ain't it? It's got to be blood. I arrested that Siwash for assaulting you, shooting you from ambush. My gosh, I'm in it now!"

He walked nervously away, trying to recall just how rough he had been with the Siwash. "I must have been pretty rough, because I was pretty mad," he concluded. "I'll have to square it up with him some way."

Walden and Nixon were moving slowly toward their cabin. They were poor losers and showed it. Walden kicked savagely at the wheel dog by way of venting his spite. "Well, your fine idea didn't work out!" sneered Nixon. "And we're cleaned right."

"Shut up!" snarled Walden.

"I don't have to shut up!" flared Nixon, squaring off. "I ain't sure but what you threw me over. I lost most of the cash, I notice."

Walden's fist shot out, but Nixon did not go down; instead, he countered. Flapjack eyed the encounter with interest, then sauntered over. "Got to maintain law and order, but I'm not going to hurry. Let 'em bang each other up a bit." They were down in the snow now, and the crowd was gathering with many a cheerful remark. It could afford to be cheerful; bets had been paid. "Gotta have somebody in jail," mused Flapjack, "somebody besides that infernal Siwash."

He grasped the pair by their respective collars. "That's it, try to alter each other's faces. What you ought to do is to bang away at each other's heart —you need a change of heart. Come on to jail and think it over."

At the jail he favored the Siwash with a glare. "Come with me!" he growled. "Bring your team along!"

At the New Deal Cafe he stopped the Siwash and entered. Five minutes elapsed, and Flapjack returned, staggering beneath the weight of a side of bacon, a ham, a bag of rice, and some potatoes. Dad Simms followed with a sack of flour. The grub was placed on the sled. "Now," said Flapjack, still glaring, "don't you ever again let me catch you watching a dog race from the brush. Next time get out alongside of the trail where people can see you. Now get out before I run you in again."

The amazed Siwash retained just presence of mind enough to shout the equivalent of "mush on" in Chinook, assisted not ungently by Flapjack Meehan's toe.

A CALIFORNIA HERMIT

FOR a number of years there has lived in the cañon near the Palm Springs Hotel, at Redlands, California, a man who has come to be known as "The Hermit of Palm Springs." His name is William Pester, and he was recently discovered making his simple preparations to leave his hermit home. When pressed for an explanation, he stated that Palm Springs is now overrun with tourists and motion-picture people who interfere with the life of contemplation he desires to lead.

When he came to Palm Springs, he explained there were only a few Indians in the neighborhood and an occasional white man. He expects to locate in the jungles of lower Mexico, where he will build a little hut and spend the remainder of his life. During all the years he has dwelt in Palm Springs Cañon he has worn but few clothes, no hat or shoes, and has lived entirely on fruits, nuts, and vegetables.

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Three Sons from Bar O X

By George Gilbert

Author of "Cow Women," "Good Haters," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

DAD BURNS, old-time rancher with three sons, becomes tired of poor cooking at his home. His wife died years before. He wants at least one son to marry and bring home a woman to run things indoors. He tells them all that they must go off sweethearting and bring home their wives; he will give the foremanship and leading place to the one who gets the best woman for a rancher's wife, Dad himself to be the judge. The three start out, Peter, the eldest, to woo Wanda Brighton, only daughter of a wealthy Easterner who has taken up an adjoining ranch; the next eldest, Gilead, to woo Prudence Heroy, only daughter of a rancher who is well off in cattle and lands. Prudence was educated at an Eastern seminary and has some snobbish ideas. Adonijah Burns, the youngest of the three, has no girl in view.

They all go first to Lightning Ranch, the home of the Brightons, to see Pete through on his share of the trip. There Pete at first seems shut out, because Wanda is being courted by Andrew Vrayne, a very wealthy ranch owner from the North, visiting the Brightons. But matters turn in Peter's favor, and then Vrayne, determined to have his way, sends North for his henchman, "Hunt" Jackson, who plots to bring Pete into disgrace in connection with a killing that he, Jackson, will do. Vrayne agrees to hide Jackson out in an adobe shack used by the range riders at certain seasons, but now deserted. They ride there together, plotting as they go.

CHAPTER VIII.

DON IS PERTURBED.

BY mighty! Don, you're sure some silent geezer since we joined this Lightnin' outfit," Gil remarked, poking fun at his younger brother. The three Burns boys were sitting together before the bunk house on blankets. It was the cool of the evening after a warm spring day, during which preparations had been actively under way for the coming round-up.

The three had shaken down well into the routine of work on the ranch. Pete was happy, for Wanda frequently put herself in his way, and the first class in fancy roping was making rapid progress.

"Don, he's thinking 'bout that pretty gal he saw in the dude wagon," Pete hazarded.

Don, generally so ready with his tongue, in repartee, however much he might keep silence under ordinary conditions, showed by the flush on his face that this shot had hit dead center.

"Seen her. Does she run airrants for those she-dudes that's visiting Miss Wanda?" Gil inquired.

"You two know where you c'n go to," and Don got up and stalked away, followed by the chuckles of his brothers.

Don seemed to have no particular object in his rambling. He joined two or three groups of smoking, story-telling men lounging about the buildings, relaxing after their good meal. He went to the corral and called up Jupe for his usual bite of fine-cut tobacco,

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which he fed him to keep him healthy. Then, noting that he was not observed, and that the dusk had drawn on apace, Don faded from sight around the corner of the corral fence, struck a low stable wall, skirted it, and edged around to the rear of the big house.

Out there he heard the soft, slurring vocables of the Mexican servants, male and female. On the doorstep of the kitchen were two girls, talking.

"Theen you air going eeway?" the Mexican girl was asking.

"Yes, Felicidad," came quiet, even tones that made Don thrill.

"For why?" eagerly.

"I mustn't tell. I needed the money, so I came here to work. I had to have it to help one I love out of trouble. He is——"

Perhaps Don made some noise in stealing closer. She ceased to speak, turned her head, stood erect, then fled into the kitchen. Don, embarrassed, felt that he had to lounge forward or stand confessed as an intentional eavesdropper. He raised his hat to the Mexican girl, strode past the end of the kitchen, caught sight of a vaquero he knew standing at the edge of the kitchen-garden a short distance farther, joined him, and passed some remarks indicative of his desire to walk about a little and smoke. So he came out of the little mishap without losing his poise and then strolled back down to the bunk house. As he went, he thought of her remark: "I had to have it to help some one I love out of trouble. He is——" Who's he?

Next morning, as the men were making ready to ride forth on their lawful occupations, Long Horn Benson, whose duty it generally was to drive a team when some of the tenderfeet were to be taken to town, expressed his opinion forcibly as to mule driving, and, in particular, mule driving to tote she-dudes to the railroad. It seemed that Hermoine Slater and Eunice Walters, visiting there with the Vraynes, were going away.

"And that likely gal who's been working for Miss Wanda, she's quit; goin' out, too. I got orders to put her onto the platform for the train t' take away. Shame t' let such a good looker get out o' the country; all you young punchers must be slow t' let her get away."

"I'd like t' know how we'd get next t' her, when Miss Wanda has kept her so busy doin' work inside no one's had time t' build up next," Ace Carver spluttered.

"Yes, Wanda gal, she's just rode close herd on that maverick," Able Ames put in; "worked her like a dawg. I think she's plumb jealous, because the gal out-ranks her in looks a whole lot."

"I can't see that," Pete objected.

"I do," Don spoke up quickly, and then several laughed.

Don managed to get Long Horn aside before they rode, and whispered with him. Long Horn nodded. "Her name's Hilda de Larme," he told Don.

When they came in that night, Don managed to get Long Horn aside, but Benson shook his head at Don's first eager query:

"She wouldn't tell where she was a-goin'. She got aboard the train without buyin' a ticket. I s'pose she did it t' keep folks from knowin' where she was bound. She could pay the conductor on the train. Of course those she-dudes went on the Pullman, but she went on the day coach."

Don thanked Benson and turned away sadly.

He had tried a number of times to make speech with the girl. She had avoided him—had avoided all the punchers, in fact. Wanda had kept the girl at a steady grind of work, too, for she had a streak of irritability at times that made it hard for her to keep a servant about her, and she was famed among the women on the place for being a "nagger."

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In a day or two Don seemed to have forgotten about the little, pretty girl who had taken up his attention. And then events came along sufficient to drive that detail of experience clean out of his reckoning.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BAR O X CALVES.

THE round-up swung down below the big house. Men were combing the little box cañons and rough nooks of land on all sides, jumping calves whose mothers had not yet appeared in the open. The cows and their offspring were hazed into the open and started toward the gathering place by the skilled riders and their no less skilled horses. The chuck wagon and bed-roll wagon moved; the remuda was kept under strict control.

And the guests who remained, Andrew Vrayne and his sister, came out to see the work. Vrayne by now had recovered his poise. He treated Wanda with easy courtesy, had even made friends with Pete Burns, who had found the ranch owner from the North anxious to learn some fine points on revolver shooting, at which Pete was admitted to be an expert. Vrayne did not overdo this; he was just a little chummy with Pete—enough to make Wanda even smile at him.

Wanda, who had managed to explain to her parents that her interest in Pete consisted in his ability to teach her how to rope, enjoyed the game. She had learned how to rope a calf—if it were not too agile a calf, and were sent out of the ruck by some obliging puncher, so she could catch it easily out of the press of cattle milling about under the dust-cloud of the round-up circle.

Pete, Gil, and Don, detailed by Struthers to ride far to the west in search of some calves known to have been hiding out in some broken country, left the round-up early one day, riding easily. They had kept together fairly well during the working periods; Struthers had often assigned them to duty that would keep them together, for he knew they would prefer it that way. The three by now were prime favorites with every one on the ranch, except for Oscar Brighton, his wife, and the Vraynes.

As they got into the broken land, Gil remarked that they were at about the farthest western limits of the Lightning range.

"Yes; and if we pushed on over that pass through the farther range, we'd be about back into country that stock from ranches near home range into," Pete commented.

"Yes; a good one-day ride would put us in Bar O X territory again," Don agreed with them.

They worked the little cups of land, the tiny draws and box cañons, sifting out not a few cows, calves, and steers. They began to find some other cattle mixed with the Lightning stock and headed them west, while they hazed Lightning stuff east, working to get it into the open. They knew that other hands would be along later to bunch the Lightning stuff, and they pushed on farther west, after getting each concealed bunch onto the lowest levels. They intended to work well to the west and then swing back down the level, driving all they could ahead of them, if other Lightning hands had not picked them up by then. Struthers had told them how the country should be worked, and they were good enough cowmen to realize that the old-timer's ideas on that point were correct. He had given them general instructions, letting them work out details to suit the conditions they found in actual practice.

"There's always some young cows, timid with their first calves, that'll hide up that a way," he had told them; "but get them hazed down onto the level where there's good grass, an' they'll be

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apt t' stay down. You ain't got none o' those little hide-holes on Bar O X; it's more open, like, so you ain't met up with those shy cows like we got here onct in a while."

The level land itself had a gradual rise to it that led them by degrees to a low, deceptive pass which did not seem to be a pass at all, unless one were wise in cow-country lore and configuration. From the top of the little pass they could look either way, down a slope that was green with new grass, the timbered or higher lands hemming it in on either hand. A few *mottes* of timber were in the level strip ahead.

"Stretch o' sand out beyond; I c'n see the heat devils dancing where the grass ends," Pete opined, shading his eyes with his hand as he stood in the stirrups to get a better view.

"Yes; I guess this good grass ends about out there. That sand ought to hold cattle back this side, if it's wide," from Gil.

"Some cattle in that last *motte,*" Don spoke suddenly; "calves, too."

"We better have a look," Pete decided for the three.

They started their horses forward, riding easily, knee to knee. As they neared the *motte,* a tall figure, dressed in steeple-crown hat with bells tinkling about the brim, flaring trousers, moccasins, serape somewhat tattered, a jacket that had been bright but now was dingy, strode into view. A dog skulked at his heels.

"Some Mexican *pastore* walking across country to join his herd or find his station, after being sent out by his boss, I guess," Gil said.

The man smiled vacantly and begged a smoke. Gil handed him the makin's.

"Those cattle in that *motte* are actin' mighty queer," Don pointed out.

The cattle, indeed, were not grazing, although grass grew between the trees in a thick carpet, as the timber was not close-set. The cattle were staring about, making little nervous starts.

"Deed you see reeders of Bar O X?" the *pastore* asked, emitting a cloud of vapor from one corner of his mouth. His black eyes were almost shut to show his enjoyment of the smoke, his manner such as to allay all suspicion as to the reason for his innocent-seeming query.

"Bar O X? No; riders from there out this way?" Pete asked.

"Si señor. Dhey pass me as Ah'm walk two-three hours ago. Dhey look for stray calf. Ah'm a-theenking Ah see theem reedin' back on that reedge, west again."

"Probably found what they wanted an' sloped back," Gil said. "By mighty! but I wish I'd seen them. We'd c'd sent Dad word we was O. K."

The *pastore,* with a wave of the hand, clucked to his dog and stalked off into the mesquite at right angles to the trail. That occasioned them no wonder, for he seemed to know where he was bound. Sheep herders had a way of appearing and wandering about, and then, they were beneath a cowman's notice so long as they kept their greasy woolies off the cattle range.

"How far'll that Mex walk?" Pete asked.

"By mighty! No one c'n tell how far a herder'll travel afoot for a job. He prob'ly had enough tobacco and papers in that serape to smoke a year steady, but they'll always beg a smoke of a white man. They're afraid they'll be in a lonely camp some time and get out of tobac," Gil said.

"Those cattle in there sure act loco," Don reminded.

They rode forward then. As they came to the edge of the *motte,* they saw that there were perhaps fifty cattle in the timber. They drove them through, starting them from afar by yelling. The cattle broke easily, and it was Gil who first saw the brand on a calf among

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the others. He called to Pete, who was nearer to him then than Don was:

"Say, Pete, here's a calf with Bar O X new-branded on it."

"I got one right ahead o' me," Pete answered.

"Same here, two o' them. But I don't see any Bar O X cows," Don called.

They spoke back and forth several times about this oddity. Once through the timber they came out onto the open land. Here the cattle were plainly very nervous. But they soon got them bunched and found them all Lightning cows and steers. But there were just ten Bar O X calves, fresh-branded and inclined to bawl.

"I never saw anything like this; where are the cows?" Pete asked as he eyed the bunch of doggies distrustfully.

"Must be a bunch of calves those Bar O X men lost some way—those that that Mex spoke about," Gil sought to explain.

"It don't tally," and Don shook his head.

"No; how'd those calves get here this a way. And yet, they seem to know those cows they're with," wonderingly.

"I don't like it," Gil fumed. He sagged over sidewise in his saddle, hooked the horn with his crooked knee, got out his makin's, and rolled one. They followed suit, and they smoked over the question for a few minutes. The calves continued to hang in with the Lightning cows.

"I wonder——" Pete began.

"Could there be Bar O X cows back there, over here after some stampede or a drift from some unusual cause?" Gil went on. "And could these calves been separated from their mothers and taken up with these Lightning——"

"A pair o' cougars charging into a herd worked up after a stampede might have turned these calves loco," Pete remarked.

"It don't tally up," Don insisted.

"That *pastore*, he said he thought he'd seen the Bar O X men riding that ridge. That would bring them down into the pass back there." Pete pointed out the likely spot where the ridge wilted down into a mere hump.

"Let's haze the hull bunch of those calves along west till we see what's up," Gil suggested.

"It don't tally," Don insisted, throwing away the stub of his cigarette, after bunting it cold with his thumb.

"I want a look at those Bar O X men, that's all," Pete said, hand on the butt of his gun. "I want t' see who's brandin' calves out here so far from home. Our bunch'd be about close to the home base by now, boys. There's something radically wrong here."

"By mighty! You said an earful then, Petey," Gil agreed.

They got the calves out of the ruck and started them up the little pass or slope. They came to the sandy stretch, and there all tracks ended, for the wind had been holding its revels there all morning, and the light sand was free of all sign. Once or twice as they advanced, Don's quick eyes, indeed, caught prints of hoofs of calves, bunched, headed toward the *motte*. But they lost even those in time. And ten cows kept bawling after them, making little rushes to get even with the calves! They swore at them and got them back. They were about to the place where the ridge came down to meet the level, when Pete, turning about, gave an exclamation:

"Look who're coming!"

They let the calves ramble and turned in their saddles.

The cows passed by, on either hand, bawling. The calves turned back and began to nuzzle at the flanks of the cows. Pete snarled:

"I tell you those are their own calves. What're we up against?"

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"It don't tally," Don intoned, and Gil spoke up:

"Those people riding after us are some o' the Lightnin' outfit, and I think there's a skirt in the bunch. They're in that *motte* now."

They waited impatiently. The riders came in plain sight in a moment more, breaking out of the timber in open order. Pete yelled to show that he had observed them. In a moment they came up—Struthers, Vrayne, Long Horn Benson, Ace Carver, Able Ames, and Wanda Brighton. She rode straight up to Pete:

"Oh, Mr. Burns, I've done wonderfully well with my roping to-day. I want to try hazing some of these calves and other real rough-and-tumble work——"

"What're those calves?" Struthers' cold voice broke through the flow of her warm talk.

Pete stiffened in the saddle.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Pete, I've known you since you was a yearlin', but what do those calves mean?" and his lean finger pointed to the bunch of cows and calves.

"Mean?" and Gil's face blazed with anger. "Mean? Ike, what do *you* mean?"

"Mean?" and he twitched his horse about so that he was between them and the calves. "Why, Lightnin' cows with Bar O X calves running beside them, the calves fresh branded; we find a new fire the other side that *motte,* a Bar O X iron all hot yet, hid in the bushes —and you three driving them toward the sandy strip that divides our ranges from those leadin' down to Bar O X territory."

"Struthers!" Pete's hand leaped to his gun. His face was livid with anger. Gil spurred to his side, and they faced Struthers. The other Lightning men dropped their hands onto their guns. It was an electric moment. A single word or untoward gesture, and lead would fly at human targets, for all were so wrought up that anything might be expected to happen.

"Pete! Gil!" came Don's cool voice.

They stared. Instead of siding with them as usual, his hands were at his sides, and he sat his horse like a statue.

"It looks very nasty," Vrayne's mean voice came into the silence.

"I don't believe it's anything that can't be explained," Wanda gasped out.

"Men, round up those calves and cows; Able, you pick up that iron as we pass back; Wanda, we didn't tell you what we found, because we wanted to come on them without their knowing we had the iron, so I let you make some remarks to them first to put them at their ease," Struthers volleyed. "Now, will you all ride back an' face the bunch at the round-up, or will you shoot it out here?"

"No; I won't——" Pete began.

"No; he's my brother; we go through together," Gil rasped.

"You're goin' back dead or alive," Struthers said quietly. He was white of face now, but firm as a rock in his saddle.

It would take but a single glance awry, a single word, to bring the catastrophe.

"Pete—Gil—do as I'm doing; hand in your guns," and Don held his guns out, butts first.

"Kid, you weak'nin'?" Pete asked.

Gil glared at Don:

"Dad Burns' boys are disgraced this day!"

"Please—you know I'm no quitter when it's fittin' to fight," Don pleaded, his eyes misting.

"No; you always went through before. He's right. If we shoot it out now, the mystery never'll be explained, and we'll go down with a stain on the name o' Burns," Pete said. He handed in his guns, as did Gil; then they rode for the round-up.

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CHAPTER X.

THE BAR O X RIDERS.

THE prisoners rode in the midst of the Lightning crew, Wanda, with Vrayne, in the rear. Vrayne had sense enough not to accuse them openly before the girl. He confined himself to murmured half hints that were more deadly than open accusations.

Struthers kept fidgeting with his bridle reins. It was plain to see that he was uneasy and did not like what he was doing. But Pete, Gil, and Don did not blame him. A very ugly situation existed, and they had to explain. It was the law of the range, not written in books or expounded by grave judges on the bench. If they appealed from Struthers' present decision, they could only appeal to Judge Colt, and, if they lost, Judge Lynch would sit in final, terrible, and speedy judgment on their cases.

As they passed the *motte,* Struthers showed them where he and Able, who had been riding apart from the others, he said, had found the embers of the fire, in a tiny hollow, where it would be overlooked. The iron was in a clump of rabbitweed a bit to one side. The handle, Struthers said, was sticking out in plain view. Then he stopped, a puzzled look on his face. Gil spoke up sharply:

"We'd build a fire like that an' leave an iron, with its handle stickin' out, eh, an' have you run out all the sign?"

Then he was silent. Don and Pete bit their lips. Struthers looked away. The other Lightning men whispered among themselves. Vrayne found time for a polite sneer that went unheeded in the general tension. Struthers answered:

"Cattle've cut the sign all up; I'll put a real tracker on later."

They had hardly cleared the *motte* when there was a hail from the rear. So intent had they all been on getting ahead, that they had not watched the trail behind. And cattle were appearing ahead, to be hazed forward, too, for Struthers had decided to do what range work was to be done as they went back. Pete, Gil, and Don had given their promises to remain quiet; the gathering of the strays might as well go forward, Struthers decided.

They wheeled at the hail. There were six men riding slowly toward them.

"I know them; it's Honey Brayman, Alec Shortin, Jim Yeoman, Harry Tinkler, George Ellis and Vic Walsh," Gil explained.

"All Bar O X hands, eh?" Struthers spoke quickly.

"Yes, and what they're doing hereaways's more'n I know," Pete said quietly. He had recovered his poise by now, and Don did not fear another outbreak of useless passion from his elder brother.

Coming first over the sand that had muffled their horses' hoofbeats, then over the lush grass of the open space, the Bar O X riders had made so little noise that they had approached within hail before being brought to the notice of the Lightning bunch. They rode up with wonder on their faces. Pete, Gil, and Don gave them curt "Howdys," and a moment of strained silence ensued. Honey Brayman broke it curtly:

"Pete, where've you been? Your dad never said a word why you three went away, right on top o' round-up, too. Whare's your guns?"

"Workin' for Lightning," equally curt.

"D'y'know what I think?" Alex Shortin exploded, eying Struthers unfavorably.

"What?" Gil asked.

"You three look like a posse had you. What's up, boys? We'll do what you say."

The other Bar O X men growled assent. Lightning's crew bunched more

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compactly. Pete stilled the rising storm:

"We're in trouble, boys. Tell me first how you're out this far."

He had addressed Honey Brayman, who was an old-time Bar O X-er.

"Well, we were all foggin' strays at the eastern limits of our range. It was time for Jim Yeoman's sister, that lives on the Palo Verde, to be married, so we asked Tarbox if we c'd go. He said if we'd not be more'n four days, and not let old dad hear of his lettin' us off right at round-up. So we rode."

"Why didn't we see you then?" Struthers demanded.

Pete signed for Honey to reply.

"Well, we didn't want Tarbox in Dutch for letting us off that a way, so we took to the high places, goin' an' comin' through here, because we knew you-all would be in round-up and maybe hazing strays out o' here."

"That sounds straight," Pete said.

"And I'll say I'm tired o' being cross-examined like a thief," Honey went on, "an' any Lightnin' man that wants in on that can have a piece, big's he wants."

Bar O X men grumbled in support of this defi. Vrayne, who had been to one side with Wanda, stepped forward:

"Struthers, ought we to lose more time getting back to——"

"Any one hear me ask his advice?" Struthers demanded of the crowd.

"But, my good man——" Vrayne began.

"My good man!" and Struthers began to beat the air with his balled-up fists. "My goodness, Agnes! Mr. Vrayne, you're my boss' guest, so you're safe—for the present."

He brought his horse up to Vrayne's and crowded the guest's horse to one side:

"Now stay out o' this while men talk," and he spurred his horse back to the uneasy bunch.

Vrayne drew aside farther yet. Wanda, instead of joining him, went close to the men. She thought: "They won't start shooting if I'm here."

She forced her way quietly into the center of the group and took her stand beside Pete. She tossed her head proudly, then smiled at Pete. He gulped and could only say:

"Wanda, girl!"

"You're white," Gil whispered to her.

"You'll make a hand," Don gave her gladly.

"And now that we've answered all these questions, what are you-all doin' with those Burns lads?" Honey persisted.

"I'll tell you," Pete spoke. "We were this way foggin' strays. We saw cattle acting loco in that *motte*. We found ten calves in there, branded Bar O X——"

"Bar O X?" Honey and his bunch shouted, leaning forward in their saddles.

"Yes," Struthers spoke dryly; "there they be, ahaid, with those Lightnin' mamas of theirn," pointing to where the little bunch of cattle were. The cattle had gone ahead when the riders had turned to greet the newcomers, and now were grazing, some staring about a bit wildly.

"What d'y'mean?" Honey demanded.

"You listen, Honey," Pete admonished. "We found those Bar O X calves with Lightning mothers. At first we thought we were plumb crazy; then that there'd been a stampede or cougars had driven cows clear off our range or some had driven here in some winter storm. In fact, we didn't know what to think, and we were driving the calves up to get them over that little path onto the range that slopes toward Bar O X region when these Lightnin' men rode onto us and accused us—the Burns boys—of branding Lightning calves and tryin' to run them off to our own range, or where they'd be picked up on the round-up and turned over to us."

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"I'd want more proof than that," Vic Walsh blazed up.

"An' so'd I," Harry Tinkler affirmed strongly.

"We got it," Struthers said; "we found a fresh brandin' fire in the *motte* where they say they found th' calves, and a hot iron hid in a bush. Able, show it to them."

"It ain't hardly cold yet," Able said, holding it out.

"That's the first I've seen o' it," Pete declared, bending toward Able Ames "it's got Bar O X letters on it, but it ain't made like we make our irons. Look at that lopsided O: Our old Mexican blacksmith that keeps our irons in order, he makes perfect letters."

"An' that handle! Dad has coiled wire welded on our irons for handles, so that they'll keep cool, like them patent stove lifters. He got the idea from seein' one o' them pictured in a mail-order catalogue," Gil said.

"That's right," Honey backed them up.

"Well, you'd not expect them to use an iron they took right out o' the home supplies, when every one on Bar O X knows how many irons you got," Ike Struthers cut in. He was a stubborn man, withal a just one at the bottom, but now he was aroused to the depths. He was seeing red, and blurted out a new cause for anger: "An' then you six Bar O X men, o' course you come ridin' along just in time t' get those calves——"

"I won't stand it——" Honey thundered, jerking his hands toward his belt.

"Gentlemen!" Wanda called, clear and cool.

"Honey!" Pete called.

They calmed instantly. Struthers knew it never would do to start shooting with her in the line of fire. If she were hurt, Rangeland never would forgive him for permitting a shooting affray where a woman was in line of fire, especially the heiress of Lightning! And Honey heeded Pete's warning, for he knew that the sons of old Dad seldom spoke without a cause.

"We'll ride behind you, boys," Honey said significantly.

"O. K.," Pete agreed, and Gil and Don nodded.

Then they took up the march again. After a moment, Don thought of something and whispered to Pete and Gil. Then he straightened up in his saddle and called back to Honey:

"Did you see a Mexican sheep-herder with a little dog?"

Honey whispered to his men and then:

"Yes, boys. He was alone. Said he was walking t' get t' Walbridge Crossin'. We told him we was after strays for a stall, so if he reported seeing us it would save Tarbox's good word with old Dad who, as you'll remember, isn't s'posed t' know but what we're riding range for him, 'stead o' goin' off to that weddin', like we told you."

"There's an alibi for everything but the calves and the iron and the fire," Struthers objected, and the Bar O X men scowled again. But, at a warning word from Pete and another from Wanda, they fell back, and the ride was resumed. Finally, Struthers got tired of keeping in behind the cattle and told off Benson and Carver to keep them coming, while he ordered Pete, Gil, and Don to come on with him and Able Ames as guards. Honey stuck close in behind them, and Wanda rode with the boys. Vrayne, thus left out in the cold, lagged behind. From time to time he shot ugly glances toward the Burns boys and Wanda, but he did not offer any more advice to Ike.

Suddenly, Don drew up so sharply that Struthers glanced at him apprehensively. He had only one man with him now, against their nine. But Don only said quietly:

"Here is where we passed that Mexi-

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can sheep-herder. It seems to me we've all been overlooking a bet in not having him seen to."

Struthers by now had begun to reason inside his own active brain, instead of following his first blind impulses. The red mist had passed from before his vision. At bottom Ike was just, if hasty in his anger. To prove that he was not holding a grudge, he fell in with Don's idea:

"Ames, ride out that Mexican's sign and bring him in. I think it's Amidas Grandez, one of Elmorale's herders. He passes through our range at times to some fandango away off south somewhere. He's got a bug that he mustn't ride a hoss. All those sheepmen got some bug or other," spitefully. "Grandez has turned north here. Able will bring him in; he knows his route."

Thus ordered, Ames found the track of the Mexican and rode away. As he rode, Struthers said to Pete:

"Ames is a fair tracker; I'm not so good. I'd run that sign back at that *motte,* but it's all cut up with cattle, an' we've been through there twice now. Besides, I want it run by Francisco, our mail rider. He's like an Apache on sign, and I'll put him on it soon's we get to the round-up. Francisco's off the mail job till round-up ends."

They spoke to show their satisfaction with the arrangement, and rode on.

They had made perhaps half the distance back to the camp when they heard Able Ames' "whoopeeee!" behind them.

Ames rode up to report that he had found the Mexican about two miles north of where he had left the trail, asleep. He might have passed the man, as the soil had vanished, leaving only rocks there, and Ames had lost the sign. But the sheep dog barked, and he found the Mexican, who had promised readily to come into camp.

"I'd rode him pillion, but he's got the flavor of sheep about him."

"I don't blame you none," Struthers agreed; "Grandez, he'll come on in. He's one Mexican that has a word that's good."

So they rode in and found the work for the day slackening down. The dust-cloud was settling after the last animal for the day had been cut out of the herd; the tired riders were longingly glancing toward the cook wagon, where the fires were sparkling. The herd was being driven off to graze before being thrown onto the bed-ground Struthers had chosen for the night. Horses neighed; men ragged one another. Into the midst of it all, the prisoners and captors rode, bringing a cyclone of questions upon them as men crowded about eager to learn what it all meant, for it was apparent in a moment that the three Burns boys, without their guns, were captives. In that land, where the gun with belt and cartridges were the marks of manhood, absence of guns meant much to the range men —meant captivity, extreme poverty, or plain lack of brains.

Struthers told the story plainly to the crowding men. Here and there some cast darker looks on the boys; most of them refused to believe that they were in the wrong. Wanda, getting her supper, made sure the Burns boys had theirs, and good ones too. Vrayne, pushed aside, retired to the tent they kept up for him. Struthers debated with Keister whether or not Brighton should be notified then. As this was going on, Grandez, the herder, came striding into camp. He advanced to Ike:

"The Señor Ames, he say the Señor Ike weesh me to come."

"Yes, Amidas; sit down," offering him a corner of his own blanket, and a cigarette, which the Mexican took eagerly.

They all sat down about the herder, whose dog curled itself at his side. Don reached over and patted the animal's

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head kindly. The white teeth of the Mexican flashed into a smile:

"He's var' good, that fice."

"Amidas," Struthers opened up, "you saw these men"—indicating Honey and his bunch, who sat on their right—"earlier to-day. And you saw these three men later. Now did you see any one else around that *motte* of timber?"

"Ah'm comin' 'long, Señor Ike," gravely, his eyes sweeping the circle, "an' Ah'm seein' these men. They reeding for strays, they say."

He smiled at Honey and his bunch.

"Then Ah'm goin' teek sleep in that *motte* that I see on pass down there. Ah'm goin' down. Mebbe so Ah'm take sleep," rolling his eyes back to indicate somnolence.

They nodded.

"Ah'm see these men," indicating Pete, Gil, and Don, "these side those *motte* timber, eh——"

"But when you first went to the *motte,* to snooze, did you see any Bar O X calves?"

"Si, señor, so many," holding up his eight fingers and two thumbs. "They bawl; there *maters,* they bawl. I smell new fire. Ah'm tired. I go sleep in hollow. None my beesnees if cattle branded. I herd ship."

"Yes, Amidas. And what then?" Ike asked anxiously.

"Ah'm watching those men," pointing to Pete, Gil, and Don, "after they pass me so. They ride into that *motte,* eh. After they go out, I see three men, walking like shipman walk, come from hide-hole near that *motte,* got into *motte.* Then leetle smoke, he comes up, like new fire for the brand, Señor Ike. Ah'm not worreed. I walk off. I take nap. Señor Ames, he comes, he's askin' me come see you. That's all."

It was easy to see that the simple-minded fellow had given a careful recital of what had happened within range of his eyes.

Struthers, puzzled, whispered with Keister a moment. Then he broke the silence:

"Where's Francisco?"

The mail rider was sent for. He came, and Ike gave him orders:

"Francisco, you'll ride up to where the big *motte* o' timber is where our range meets that sandy stretch close to where the land slopes away to the next range. You know where?"

Francisco nodded gravely.

"You'll find in the *motte* where a fire was. You'll run all sign and return with a report. A straight, fair report."

"Si, señor."

He was turning away. Don called to him:

"Remember, Francisco, the good name of three men depend on it. I'm takin' your word, ace high."

The mail rider flashed him a smile that the flare of the new camp fire showed plainly.

"Ah'm meek true report, señors. The sun, when he comes up, finds me at the *motte.* I slip there to-night, señors."

Within five minutes, Francisco, on his favorite horse "Colorado," flashed out of the camp.

"What do we do?" Pete asked of Struthers.

"Give me your word you won't quit camp till he gets back."

"I say, they ought to be guarded." A slow, easy voice came over the heads of the sitting men to Struthers.

"That you, Vrayne?" getting up and facing the visitor. "I said once to-day if you weren't the guest o' the boss I'd do what ought t' be done t' you. I don't want t' speak no plainer'n that."

The low growls of the men convinced Vrayne. He turned away and went to his tent again.

"We'll turn in, boys," Pete said to his brothers.

The groups about the camp fire melted away. Honey and his men were given blankets and slept all about the

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place where the sons of their employer lay during the long hours that intervened until dawn.

Vrayne, in his little tent on the outskirts of the camp, was uneasy that night. He had a foreboding of evil that he could not shake off. It was relieved some time in the night when a faint scratching noise at the rear wall of his tent aroused him from a semi-torpor. He spoke in a whisper:

"Come in, Jackson."

The wiry, snakelike man slid in under the slack of the tent's rear wall. Vrayne did not make a light. They conversed in low tones:

"Jackson, I think you did your part well, but I'm not sure——"

"Not sure! I took risks 'nuff, brandin' those calves an' bunching them right where they'd be found. You're talkin' mighty queer, seems t' me."

"I got you word that Struthers had fixed his details the night before so that those Burns boys would go away off there after those strays. I heard Struthers talk it over with Keister and tell him just where he was going to assign the men to work the next day—that was yesterday, as it's now past midnight. That left you time to get your two men together and put through a plan to job the Burnses. Did you see the flash-light signals through that slit in the rear wall of the tent again tonight?"

"Yes, but I'd come, anyway, t' find how things're goin', boss. Just what happened?"

Vrayne outlined for him the events of the day, as he understood them. Jackson clucked with satisfaction.

"I don't see how it can go wrong, especially as those Bar O X punchers blundered right in the middle of it. They bein' where they are, cinches it tight. Makes it seem as if those Burnses misbranded those calves an' had those punchers there t' drive 'em home."

"Jackson, you've done some clever work for me, but now you are a fool! Your plan was too good. Those punchers came over to a wedding. The wedding was that of one of the sisters of a Bar O X man. The wedding is a matter of public record; it was held and witnessed by many; those Bar O X men were there, so they've a good reason for being where they were."

"Boss," his voice was strained and anxious, "I saw them ride through, heard them talkin' 'bout strays as I watched at the trailside. I thought they were after strays. I'm new in this country, boss, an' may've made a mistake. The scheme looked air-tight."

"Too good, Jackson. Too good to be true! And they've sent over to that *motte* of timber the best trailer in the Southwest, Francisco Romerez. He'll take the trail at dawn. He can do, they tell me, what an ordinary Apache trailer can not. He has a dash of Chiracahua in him, they say, and is like a bloodhound."

"He might trail me to this camp, then! Up north I always thought no man c'd trail men when I set out t' leave a blind trail."

"But you never ran up against one of these Southern trailers, Jackson. I'm afraid something will slip yet."

"Boss," earnestly, "suppose Francisco doesn't make any report?"

There was a long silence, then whispers, lower, lower, and more and more sibilant, like the hissing of serpents.

And presently the rear wall of the tent quivered, and a slender, gliding form stole away from the camp!

CHAPTER XI.

FRANCISCO TRAILS.

INTENT upon his task, Francisco Romerez rode swiftly back over the trail the cavalcade had made in driving the misbranded cattle and calves toward the camp. He found the little bunch

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under herd half way between the camp and the *motte,* hastily greeted Long Horn Benson and Ace Carver, in charge of them, and sped onward. He reached the *motte* well after dark and made camp. Dawn found him in the saddle.

The sign of the Burns boys' coming and passing through the *motte,* their driving of the calves toward the sandy stretch, were perfectly plain to that premier tracker. He tallied up where Struthers and his men had arrived and departed, finally going away with the Burns boys; he found where the Bar O X men had joined the party; where they had came down the ridge to the level; where Amidas Grandez had passed and been overtaken. In all, he traveled perhaps ten miles working all this out, and he did it without check to his speed, for it was all plain to his practiced eyes. Any good cattle man could have done that much.

For the last Francisco saved another set of tracks that he recognized from the first as different—made by men under leadership of a different sort, men with a motive for moving furtively. He found where these men, three of them, had struck the trail at an angle above the *motte;* where they had roped calves here and there, driving them to the *motte;* where they threw them and hog-tied them in a group, their mothers joining them there. And he found the branding fire, some scorched hair and blood that had flowed onto the leaves from the seared edges of the burns made by the irons; so he knew that some of the calves had been thrown after branding and held with their new brands, bleeding and raw, pressing against the earth. And then those three had gone aside, had concealed themselves in a hollow on top of a knoll. Francisco found there the quids of tobacco that told of long waiting during which the watchers did not smoke, so chewed more than enough to make up for lack of smoking. And then the three, the mysterious three, had gone away, riding carefully.

And now, as before they had reached the *motte,* where their activities made them less wary, they left a faint trail, faint, indeed. Yet Francisco worked with an eye to the weather, that now seemed to threaten rain. He worked as swiftly as he could. The triple trail went to higher ground, to a bare knife-edge of a rise between two draws, and it would have deceived any one but the premier trailer who was on it. Often he had to get out of the saddle to puzzle out some detail. Then he would lead his horse, a well-trained, dun gelding. Francisco would speak softly to the horse at such times, and the intelligent animal would whinny to the man understandingly. The dun horse and the furtive man glided along quietly. The knife-edge ridge ended in a sandy waste, and that led to a patch of sun-baked clay which could hardly be dented with the hoof of a horse. Francisco smiled at the devices used to deceive—and went steadily on. The morning was far spent when he had his reward. He knew he was well back toward the main camp again, but about five miles to the north of it. His sense of direction was little short of perfect. The trail led toward lower levels!

Francisco saw the tiny thread of smoke coming from behind a cut-bank in a little pocket. He left his dun gelding to nip the gramma grass, and he crept, Apache fashion, toward the camp. He got to where he could peer over the last lump of rolling land and saw two men cooking a slim meal over a mere handful of dry twigs. Francisco circled the camp, found where the third man had left it the night before. He puzzled over this, as he saw where the third man's trail led toward the main camp. He heard the two in the camp humming easily; they had stretched themselves at ease, as those who wait the return of another.

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Francisco, gliding like a fox, came to his dun gelding, mounted him, and made his way silently to where that third trail led toward the main camp. He began to follow out that last thread of the web. As he followed it, his face worked; his brows knit.

That subtle strain of Indian blood, overlaid with many another in the strange mixture of human streams along the border, yet was potent in the make-up of Francisco Romerez. The Spanish portion of him was unsuspicious; his white man's brain was working on the problems of the trail, that he might make a true report, as he had pledged himself to do. And as he rode he was more and more aware that rain might intervene and make his report the only one that would ever be made. He was glad he had done what had been asked of him and done it well, too. Few others could have done it—perhaps none in that whole region.

So using his white man's brain, the premier trailer rode easily for some distance. And then the Chiracahua tenth of him awakened to uneasiness. A glint of something caught from the tail of the eye—the quick wheeling in the saddle to see what was concealed atop that bunch of tumbled rocks where the catclaw had found a little dirt for its roots, and then——

A jet of flame spurted from the glossy leaves there.

Francisco pitched forward; his dun gelding plunged ahead.

Hand on the dun's mane, foot hooked over the saddle horn, Francisco clung, and the dun sped ahead.

Three more shots followed the dun in his flight, and he sank down. Then, from behind the ambushment of the thorny clump, a serpentine man slid down to the level and started toward the dun gelding. He had to pick his way, for he tried not to leave a trail, and so he stepped from rock to rock; there were not a few laying around. He kept his eyes on the dun gelding as much as possible—and on the still form of the man beside the dun.

The killer bent over, a smile of triumph on his face, his bearing negligent, as one who has completed a task well.

As suddenly the form beside the dun stirred; a gun leaped into the face of the killer.

"Ah'll take that reefle, señor——"

So spoke Francisco silkily. Jackson's face went white. The rifle clattered to the ground. Francisco got half up, crouching there while the man with the wide jaws held his glance firm.

Jackson's hand flashed over toward his hip.

Yes, he attempted to draw, though it was under cover, a gun that seldom missed. Jackson's brain, working lightning-quick, saw this, that if he were taken, then he would surely die, and he took the thousandth chance. His hand flicked toward his hips, and so speedy was his draw that their guns seemed to cross the spirts of flame as the two shots blended into one roar. Francisco spoke sharply, spoke as the guns ceased firing:

"Ah'm pleege breeng you in alive, so you able make talk."

Jackson's gun fell; he grasped his wrist as Francisco flipped upright and reversed his gun, end for end, bringing the butt crashing down onto the forehead of the killer. Jackson crumpled.

Ten minutes later, the dun gelding was left for the buzzards, after Francisco had stripped him of saddle and bridle and thrown them under the nearest bunch of catclaw, to be picked up later. Francisco was marching his captive, afoot, toward the main camp. Jackson's wrist, that the trailer had numbed so fortunately, still bled, but the wound was not serious.

As they went, the weather drew on unmistakably threatening. Distant lightning began to show on the rim of the far horizon. Francisco kept the captive

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well ahead of him, and his own gun, cocked always, was in line with the fellow's back.

So they came to the camp, and men swarmed about them, questioning. Francisco held his way undeviatingly toward the place where Struthers stood beside the chuck wagon, the captive close-herded before the captor. And there, still holding the killer at the point of his gun, Francisco, in terse phrases, made his report which Jackson, with bowed head and eyes seeking beyond the ambushment of thin brows the face of one he knew, listened to in silence. Once as Francisco talked Jackson glimpsed Vrayne, who managed, while all men eyed the captive and captor, to convey a signal to Jackson for silence and present acquiescence in what might befall. Jackson nodded, then looked away. He felt sure that his powerful protector would not fail in giving him assistance, for, thought he: "If I'm in it, he's in it worse still."

While Francisco talked, the storm gathered in closer. A man rode in from where the herd was being worked to report that the beeves were uneasy and might break away. They had been worked and harried, were resentful of all control. Even as the messenger talked, the lightning forked down closer at hand. Struthers, impatient at this delay, as Francisco closed, delivered his decision:

"Good boy, Francisco! You've done a good job. It's my judgment this geezer and his pals are responsible for misbrandin' those calves, but for the life of me I can't see why they did it that a way. What is there to it?" he demanded of Jackson.

"Go find out," calmly.

The lightning forked again. They could hear the lowing of the uneasy herd.

"You're right on the aidge o' death," and Struthers stepped close to the slender man with the spready, serpentine jaws. "You can't come onto this range an' run a blazer like that."

"I'll meet trouble when I come to it," Jackson flashed back.

The lightning seemed to burst, right overhead in a myriad of flaming tongues. The thunder came. Rain began to spatter.

"She'll be a he-one when she comes. We got t' hold that herd. Put this skunk in a tent well bound up, an' I'll go over this case afterward. Pete, Gil, and Don, I apologize t' you for suspectin' you——"

"Well, it had a bad look from the start, I'll admit," Pete spoke up, offering Ike his hand. The others shook hands, and Honey and his bunch crowded around. Wanda, from the edge of the crowd, laughed, and Pete, turning to her, said:

"Wanda, you never thought we was cattle thieves, nohow. Thank you, girl."

Vrayne, shouldering forward, shook hands with the boys, and in the general jubilation they took his hand. Jackson, hustled aside and bound, was put into a small tent the cook used to protect certain stores from the possibility of rain. They made his bonds secure and put two men to watch him. Then all the available men in camp mounted and rode for the herd. The storm closed down; Wanda went to her own tent; the cattle could be heard moaning, when the wind paused in its lashing for a new burst of elemental fury. The storm made the landscape dark, and the men at the captive's tent went inside and crouched at the entrance. Jackson, prone at the rear of the tent, was in plain sight of them when they turned about from time to time. They were listening for the rumble of the cattle. Suddenly, one of them, Ace Carver, shouted:

"They're runnin'; that last clap o' thunder started 'em."

The other guard got up, and they

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peered out from between the tent-flaps to catch, if possible, a glimpse of the distant herd should it career toward the camp. They knew that the full force of punchers at hand would turn the cattle in a short time and set them to milling, but where? Would the stampede pass over the site of the camp?

"They're goin' off t' the west," Carver judged. Then he turned about for another look at the captive.

The rear wall of the tent was slit from top to bottom. The man was gone. The cut bonds, revealed by a lightning flash whose glare illumined the tent as the noonday sun, showed on the ground back there; the very impression his form had made on the light soil was to be seen, but of the man—not a trace.

The two leaped into the open, guns drawn. They whirled about to the rear of the tent. In the wet soil, footprints showed, two sets of them, that were dissolving before their eyes as the rain beat on them. Then they heard the sound of a horse galloping.

Their guns leaped—flamed. In vain!

Jackson, astride a horse he had stolen from the temporary rope corral that had been set up to hold chance mounts which needed to be thus confined right at the camp's edge, had gone, without saddle or bridle. And the rain, falling in sheets, took away his trail. Before they could mount and ride, he had gone into the heart of the storm.

When Struthers and the others came back to camp, after checking the run of the herd, they heard the story. Struthers caught at the crucial point in it:

"You say there was the footprints o' two men at the back of that tent? Two? Then he had help right in camp who——"

"Or perhaps confederates of his followed Francisco and the captive into camp and stole in and released him during the storm," Vrayne suggested.

"Yes, he had two pals, an' I'm blamin' myself that I didn't send riders to get them at their camp. But that storm came on; the herd had t' be taken keer o'; cattle comes first of all. Now he's gone, an' his pals, too, an' the rain's washed away all sign. Looks like a clean get-away."

"Yes," came the insinuatingly soft voice of the man, "you were in a hard place, Struthers, and had to decide. You saved the herd, and that means you saved a lot of work from being done over again collecting it. I'm willing to state to Mr. Brighton that you did what was right. Whoever that man was and whatever his game, he'll fight shy of this outfit again, I'll be bound."

"That's right an' fair," Struthers said, pleased at this hearty word of approval. Men all about him spoke in the same vein. Indeed, without the clew of Vrayne's connection with Jackson to guide him, with the rain washing out all sign, Struthers had fair reason to believe that he had done the best possible. The misbranding of the calves was discussed from all angles during the rest of the day, by men at work and men in camp. The upshot of it was that they catalogued it as one of the mysteries of Rangeland which might or might not be solved. Honey Brayman and his crowd rode for Bar O X, instructed by Pete to tell Tarbox quietly what had befallen.

The day passed, as did others. Wanda returned to the big house; Vrayne, with tact, remained with the workers, putting himself out to become chummy, conquering, with his power to please when he so willed, even Pete, Gil, and Don. He played cards with the men, hunted all about the camps they made, managed to get from somewhere for them all plenty of good cigars and tailor-made cigarettes. The incident of the calves faded from the foreground of talk as those vivid, eager, glorious men flashed through the sun-kissed

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hours of strenuous endeavor, for their every moment was so crowded with keen experience and joy of life that the woes of yesterday were quickly erased!

If Vrayne watched Peter aslant; if he kept close to Struthers the better to be able to learn just where and how the men were detailed or were to be detailed on the morrow or on other tomorrows in the future, he gave no sign. A past master at deception, he played his game shrewdly and with a certain zest—and was always smiling, laughing, chaffing.

Came a day when Vrayne, under pretense of hunting to get fresh meat for the use of the camp, rode away to the southward alone. He rode slowly enough at first, and then, when well away from the main camp, he sent his horse along keenly. Noon found him at the camp of the line riders, the adobe-walled hut where he had advised Jackson to make his headquarters.

Jackson was there with two other men. These men, Jem Parkins and Krist Falden, were guntoters Jackson had picked up in Pimola. Neither of them possessed great brain power, but in the hands of Jackson they were fit material to use in frontier deviltry. They did not know Vrayne for what he was; Jackson had never let them into the full secrets he reserved for himself alone.

Vrayne had passed with them as a man whom Jackson had known, and who was willing to stake him until he was out from under the present cloud due to the calf branding. The two never had known just why that job had been done, although Jackson had told them a lie that satisfied them at the time. The job brought them in money, whisky, the opportunity to gamble and have their losses paid. They cared for little else, being common border wastrels.

Jackson and Vrayne went aside after a time and talked in low tones, while the two wastrels were content to imbibe the drink Jackson had doled out to them.

"The Burnses will be in Pimola in three days," Vrayne told the killer. "The R D outfit has had bad luck. One hand broke a leg in a dog hole, one has had to go home to a funeral, and the man they have to represent them with the round-up is sick. Quite a lot of their cattle got over onto Lightning range this spring, and Struthers has detailed the three Burns boys to drive them home for R D. They'll be through and back in Pimola in three days."

Jackson's eyes were close-lidded; his jaws worked, seemed to spread out. The handsome man of the world who paid him could hardly repress a shiver, so malignant did the killer then seem as he spoke.

"O. K., boss. Listen for news from Pimola. But there's three of them——"

"Look to that yourself. You know the usual terms—what I've always paid; but down here I couldn't give you the political protection I could up north——"

"I'll take the chance. I can't afford to fall down even once."

"No, you can't, Jackson," with a shade of meaning new to the other. Jackson stared, his eyes flicking wide open; then they were close-lidded anew, and his jaws worked again.

"No, I can't. You've too much on me, boss. And I've too much on you," suddenly catching the other by the wrist with a dart of his hand like the dart of a serpent's head as he strikes his fangs into a victim's body. Vrayne shrank back, then laughed—albeit, a laugh of bravado:

"Well, Jackson, you've served me for years now. We won't quarrel at this late day."

"No, boss," eagerly.

"Here's plenty of money for ex-

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penses," tendering a chunky roll of yellow bills.

Jackson's tongue appeared between his lips as he took the money.

"That talks to me in a way nothin' else does," he whispered.

Vrayne went away after a time, after Jackson had made the two wastrels glad with portions from the fat, yellow roll. He went away thoughtful and uneasy, often rubbing his wrist where Jackson had clutched it so closely; rubbed it and seemed to feel that it had been encircled, not with the warm fingers of a man, but with the coil of a serpent!

CHAPTER XII.

END OF A TWISTY TRAIL!

RACKING along the trail from R D Ranch to Pimola, the beef cut from the round-up for the little outfit safely delivered, conscious that they had helped in a neighborly action for the benefit of a weakened lot of neighbors, Peter Burns, Gil Burns, and Don Burns were happy. Before them, it seemed, was but a ride back to their own outfit, with a vivid half day spent in Pimola, warm little town filled with frontier delights!

So, racking easily, they clattered up the rambling street of the cow town, swung down before a likely oasis, irrigated mildly, went out, ambled up and down the street, bought some candy, chewed that, found a place where dwelt the tiger, toyed with his whiskers for a time—sedately, as became men now of responsibilities.

Several times they saw a slender, silky-muscled man in places where they loafed. Saw, too, at the tie rail of a certain Mexican joint a horse built for speed, a *grulla* of parts; and over him they cast judgmatical glances several times.

"That hoss c'd make a get-away if his owner wanted," Don opined.

"Surest thing," Gil agreed, stuffing another bit of candy alongside his sweet tooth that by now was nearly filled.

Pete, his mind on what he guessed was to be his happiness, was silent.

"There's a good monte game in here, strangers," said some one at their elbow. They turned upon him. Just a wastrel, such as will give a stranger unasked information in a strange town! He was lipping a half-smoked cigar negligently; his shoulders sagged.

"I guess that's the only joint we ain't been in," Gil said; "how'd we miss it?"

"Too much Mex for me," Pete objected.

Gil, however, wanted monte. He hadn't played any in a dog's age. The man smiled widely, chewed the cigar, sidled away. And the three went in. They had a full hour left, and they had not been in there before. So why not? Gil asked. Besides, he wanted to get in on monte.

In there they found a bar at the back, tables along the sides. It was quiet, for the day was at the dullest. They lounged about a moment. It was then that they saw the man with the half chewed cigar come in after them. With him was another man of his own ilk, and still another man, of a far different ilk. This one, a slender, gliding man, was in between the two wastrels. He walked on the balls of his feet, as one who could spring, dart, and strike.

"Some bad hombre," Don had time to whisper to his brothers.

The three came forward, and then the brothers knew who that man was.

"It's the gent Francisco brought in, and who escaped in the storm," Gil whispered.

He kept on toward them with his thumbs now hooked in his belt. So quickly had they glided there that no one could have described the motion. The brothers had wheeled in line. The place became strangely silent.

"Well, you see what you're lookin' for?" the serpent-man demanded ven-

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omously. His eyes were close-lidded. Peter, in the center of the Burns boys, faced him squarely. They were barely ten feet apart.

"Yes," Peter's voice filled the silence boomingly; "a man that's goin' t' knuckle or die!"

It seemed that the very air was electric with menace.

The wide jaws of the slender man worked; his face became a mask of horror.

Lines of fire crossed; booming reports filled the room, making it seem to rock. Gil's man crumpled, a neat hole in his forehead; Don's spun about; Pete, his gun a trifle jammed in the holster, was a heartbeat slow, and it was Don who threw his second gun over in time.

The two wastrels and the serpent-man were prone. Gil and Don were upright. Pete swayed, and they caught him as he fell.

"Pete," and Don's voice choked, "where are you hit?"

"I guess it's not dangerous. In the shoulder. Thanks, old man," and his head lopped over. He was still.

Now Babel arose—clack of Mexican speech, volleying curses in English as men shoved their way into the room. And then came Sheriff Sands, whom the boys knew well; and then the tale was told. He heard the story as the three bodies laid out there on the much-trodden floor, and he absolved the Burns boys upon the testimony of the men of the joint, who told a straight tale. He heard of the calf incident where the slender, stricken man had been involved, and Pete, who had paid particular attention to Francisco's description of the two accomplices, identified them as the men Francisco had seen in the camp before he had been shot at by Jackson on his return to the main camp.

"Well, it's a queer business. I'd say that there's some man that's got a reason for putting you Burns lads off the map," Sands gave as his opinion. Pete's shoulder had been dressed roughly. No attempt had been made to move the stricken men laid out on the floor. One of them stirred. It was Jackson.

They gave him water, then a small drink, and he came to consciousness, plainly for the last time. He was weak; his jaws were lax, not spready now. Sands tried to make him talk, but he shook his head stubbornly.

"I won't talk."

"You're goin' t' die."

"That may be. I won't talk."

Sands spoke, as if casually: "Burns, did the man that hired this man to kill you boast he'd have you killed? We can get him easy."

The jaws began to work again on the serpent-man. His body writhed; he rolled over onto his back, and his thin-lidded eyes glared at them balefully:

"So you've got the goods on Vrayne?"

Then he stopped. The prescience that comes before the last great change showed him he had been frightened into an error. But the error had been made, the way opened for further cross-examination.

Two hours later they had a signed confession, complete, of Jackson's misdeeds and Vrayne's connection with some of them. Jackson was dead.

Next day, Sands, with the Burns boys, rode into the Lightning camp. He rode without haste; he did not waste a motion. He rode straight to where Vrayne lounged before his tent, and he swung his gun down.

"Andrew Vrayne, I arrest you for complicity in cattle rustling and other crimes!"

The man yielded abjectly and within the hour was bound for Pimola, there to be tried later.

Peter and his brothers, overjoyed to

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be free of the last shred of suspicion, were sent by Struthers next day back to the big house with a full account of the outcome.

CHAPTER XIII.

YES AND NO.

FIVE miles from Lightning's *casa primero,* or big house, Pete's "Chunkead," that he had taken for the important ride back there with the big news, whickered; and Pete, Gil, and Don became aware that the top horse of Pete's had scented an old friend, for he had struck up a real acquaintance with Wanda's cow pony, "Whiskaway," that she had used so much while she was with the round-up, and especially while Pete had been teaching her to rope.

They hailed the girl gladly. She had been out for a ride. To tell the truth, she had been lonely for perhaps the first time in her life. A feeling of vaguest unrest had been hers for several days. Generally, she had been able to forget men easily, but since leaving the round-up she would think of Pete and then——

"Howdy," Pete gave her as they came abreast of her.

"Howdy, boys! I'm honestly glad to see you," and she gave her firm, well-muscled, but small, hand to Pete.

Gil and Don discreetly rode ahead. Somehow, the other two found themselves lagging behind.

Pete told Wanda the news, and she waited till he had finished; then:

"I was sure you were not to blame, Peter."

"I know, Wanda girl," softly, bending over in his saddle toward her, as Chunkead nipped at Whiskaway's mane playfully.

Wanda felt a warmth about her heart, a tingle that went to her finger's ends. She sensed what Pete was going to say; she wanted him to say it, and yet——

She had been courted since she was a small girl. She had acquired a habit of toying with the affections of men and enjoyed the feeling of being mistress of the destiny of men. She hated, at the bottom, to give over her queenship and take up with one man. She felt her control over herself slipping as this big, virile cow-puncher leaned toward her and played upon her heart-strings so deliciously. She wanted to say "Yes;" she wanted still more to keep him as her courtier. She needed, to tell the truth, a touch of mastery or opposition to overcome the latent contrariety of her nature. So, as Pete warmed up to his wooing, she turned outwardly cool, and Pete, a little vexed, yet drawn on to hope for the future, let her put him off with half whispered words and shy glances and banter.

They arrived at the big house without the decisive word said or answer given, and Wanda, wishing to dream a bit over what she felt was to come, wishing to enjoy anew her feeling of control over this strong, earnest man, slipped away as soon as her horse had been taken to the stables. The boys put their horses in the home corral, hung up their horse-gear, and went to the house to report. Pete had asked Wanda to let him make the first report to her parents, and she had consented to this arrangement.

There were only a half dozen riders about the home base—sufficient to do needed work and to enable Oscar Brighton to keep up his wonted state. Brighton and his wife were under the east gallery of the big house, enjoying the shade, when the three boys came to report. Pete, spokesman, touched his hat. Brighton, still turning over some mail, let the cow-puncher wait a full two minutes, while Mrs. Brighton rocked on and sewed on some pretty trifle.

"Good day, ah—Burns," Brighton gave Pete a bit loftily. Gil and Don

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moved their feet uneasily, but Pete was very upright.

"I am sent by Mr. Struthers to make a report, sir," said Pete very calmly—to outward appearances.

"Oh—ah—yes," without offering the boys a seat; "um—ah—something important happened?"

"Yes, sir," with tantalizing slowness. "Very important, sir."

"I know whatever it is, that Mr. Vrayne had a decidedly good part in it," Mrs. Brighton spoke up, ceasing to rock.

"I couldn't say just that, ma'am," quietly.

"No?" staring at him.

"In fact, ma'am," addressing her directly, "Mister Vrayne, he is at present in jail down in Pimola——"

"Pree-pos-ter-ous!" jerking herself upright and staring at him icily.

"Burns, you are not jesting?" Brighton demanded testily.

"I'll tell you what Struthers told me t' tell you, sir," with decision. While Mrs. Brighton stared and Brighton fidgeted about in his easy-chair, Pete unfolded the tale. When he had finished, Mrs. Brighton glared.

"I don't believe a word of it."

"My dear——" Brighton spluttered.

He believed it, for he had sense enough to see that Burns would not tell such a tale out of his own head when it could be confirmed or denied in a short time by sending for Struthers. Wanda had told them what she knew up to the time of leaving the round-up, of course. But this dénouement was too much for Mrs. Brighton. She spoke sharply to her husband:

"Oscar, send a rider at once to Struthers for confirmation or denial of this vague—ah—report. And Miss Vrayne must be warned not take it seriously in case she overhears any gossip before we know for certain."

"Yes, m'dear," for that seemed to offer a way out without direct affront to any one.

He did not invite Pete to sit down, but ordered him rather brusquely to send him one of the Mexicans. Pete, white to the lips, turned on his heel, and the three brothers jingled away. Pete found a Mexican vaquero and sent him to Brighton. Then the three went to the bunk house. It was Don again who found tongue first:

"Petie, we kept in before them two, but it was a case o' hold hard or die hard. One minute more, an' I'd told him a few."

"I'd like t' inform the whole universe what I think o' that pair," Gil growled; "if that Wanda is like them——"

"She ain't," Pete defended her stoutly.

"Did you get in a good word to her as you rode side by each after we met up with her?" Don asked.

Pete blushed.

"Not rightly, boys, but I came mighty close," he said.

"By mighty! I'd whirl down on her, if I was you," Gil insisted. "I don't want to stay with this outfit all my life; I got t' go cou't Prude Heroy some time before I grow whiskers. I wouldn't lose time."

"Yes, you would—like fun," Don remarked. "I've seen you sit half an hour with Prudence Heroy an' not open your fool mouth onct."

Gil subsided then. Pete smiled thanks at Don, who added:

"Now, Petie, our time's gettin' short. Get Wanda into a corner and make her say it."

"Easy talk, Donnie," with all the superior wisdom of an elder brother, "but you never went after a maverick yet."

"If I did, I'd get her," sententiously.

"A go-getter for men ain't always a go-getter for women," a bit shortly.

They were under orders from Struthers to remain at the home base

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until called for, and he had not indicated any particular work for them to do, telling them that they could use their judgment when they arrived as to what to busy themselves at. The day was already over half gone. They found some work about the horse corral and went at that. Gil and Don, seeing Wanda coming, edged away from Pete several sections off. They exchanged a smile when the girl sidled up to Pete and the two began to talk. Gil and Don edged farther and farther away.

"Wanda," Pete began suddenly, without waiting for her to take command of the conversation, "I been a long time wantin' t' ask your opinion on a certain matter," and he drove home a staple while she kept silence a moment. Peter had something strange about him just then. She felt somehow that he was about to ask her a question that she could not dodge.

"What would you think," Pete went on, "of a man that was so all-fired fond of a girl that he was afraid t' ask her t' be his wife for fear she'd refuse?"

"I'd say she ought to be glad to have a man that fond of her." As she spoke she leaned against the post into which Pete had just driven the staple and thus cut him off from his work.

"Wanda," throwing down the hammer and letting the unused staple drop, "I'm the man. I've been hintin' 'round, an' you've been playing coy, long enough. Wanda"—his arms out in intensity of masculine appeal—"I want you t' marry me——"

Instead of yielding to his entreaty, the girl drew back.

"But, Peter, if I said yes, would we live at Bar O X?"

"Why not?" stiffening.

"Oh, to be plain, it's not a woman's ranch. I've heard of it——"

"I know; we kept a stag outfit. Things ain't very tidy. I'll own up. You been brought up nice an' tender, and Bar O X ain't fittin' for you, I s'ppose——"

"I don't want to hurt your feelings, Peter," coming closer to him, "but your father has means; he could give us improvements——"

"Us—do you mean us?" reaching toward her again, but she drew away.

"I mean whoever you married. Peter, I'd like t' think it over."

Peter's hand went down to his sides—empty, futile! He hunched his shoulders. Then came the interruption:

"Wanda!"

It was Oscar Brighton, who had approached around a corner of the fence without being observed. Some loose boards were piled against that corner as a windbreak, and he had evidently been behind them long enough to overhear some of their talk.

"Wanda! You know I've told you not to accept serious attentions from any of these cow-punchers," and his face was almost purple, for now he had an opportunity to vent his rage over the outcome of the situation Vrayne had created. He knew it would bring a certain discredit upon them, for he had introduced the man everywhere, and Mrs. Brighton had given it out for certain that Vrayne was to wed Wanda.

"Father!" and her eyes blazed. "I am of age and shall do just as I please."

She stalked away, very erect, majestic in her poise and blond beauty. Pete gazed after her hungrily. Brighton, with a sharp warning to Pete to "remember your position," went after her.

Gil and Don came up on the run as soon as Brighton was gone. They were laughing.

"Pete, you won—by mighty!"

"She'll say 'yes' t' spite ol' Brighton."

From where they were, they could see Wanda go to her mother under the gallery. Brighton, puffing after her, arrived in the midst of what the boys knew was a rather heated session between mother and daughter. They

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could see that Wanda, aroused, seemed to have it all her way after a time, and then she stalked inside, like another Juno, and without one backward glance.

"If Pete gets her," Don whispered to Gil, "he'll have some crowded moments afterward; but she'll make a humdinger, at that."

Gil grinned silently.

They worked till quitting time. After the evening meal, they sat before the bunk house on their blankets. They heard Struthers and some others ride in; then the lights in the ranch office glowed. They heard Francisco talking to some of his friends, and he lounged down to tell them that Brighton had ordered him in, too, that he might check up all points of the story about Vrayne.

Struthers came presently. He was plainly ill at ease.

"Boys," as he sat down, "I'd quit this job this minute, only I know when Oscar Brighton gets over this flurry he'll be a good boss again. He's a just man and square as a die, when he's leveled down. He's calming down some now. I've give him the straight o' this story. I think it'll come out O. K."

He left them feeling well satisfied that he had done a man's part in setting them right before Brighton. They were discussing the situation when a Mexican lad came furtively up to the group and begged a cigarette of Pete. There was nothing unusual about this, for Pete at times had given the older lads about the place a tailor-made now and then. He brought out the box from which he was using smokes when he got tired of rolling his own. As he drew his hand back, he found a bit of paper in it. The lad scuttled off—with the box of cigarettes. Pete was about to yell at him, when he glanced at the paper again, puffing up the lighted end of his cigarette to do so. The bit of paper was a small note, tight-folded.

Pete went inside the bunk house, and in there he read the note by the light of a match:

PETE: Mother has shut me in my room. Saddle my Whiskaway and get me out.

WANDA.

Pete whistled and then thrust the note into the front of his shirt.

Pete knew where Wanda's room was—in the northeast corner of the big house. He often had mooned about under the windows there, hoping for a glimpse of her or to hear the sound of her voice.

He got Gil and Don aside in a few moments and whispered to them what had happened. They consulted as to what must be done.

Wanda, sitting on the edge of her bed, fully dressed, waited. She heard some one coming up the stairs, down the hall. Then her mother entered, and the girl bounced from the bed to a chair.

"Wanda! Aren't you going to bed?" anxiously.

"No, mother, not now," calmly.

"But, you'll be all tired out. I am, after the scene you made me go through with," striding over to the side of her daughter quickly. "What is there about that Burns boy? He's just a cowpuncher, like the rest."

"He's eldest brother of three whose father own 100,000 cows," quietly; "and he's a man, not a crooked fop, like Vrayne."

"There you go, accusing me of Vrayne's crimes, as if I were responsible for him."

"I don't hold you responsible for him so far, but if you oppose my knowing Peter Burns——"

"I do." Her voice rose shrilly. "I do. I forbid you to see him or be with him—oh, I shall go to your father again and insist that he take you East. I'll show you, Wanda, that you have a firm, energetic mother, if you have always thought I was weak and vacillating."

"I never did," as the mother went to

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the door to lock it on the way out. She paused in the doorway and demanded, key ready to turn, door just ajar:

"You never did what?"

"Think you were weak and all that, mother. Good night."

"I'll show you; stay here until you hear from me. Do you hear?" stamping her right foot as she snapped the lock home.

"Yes, mother," meekly. She could afford to be meek, for she had heard Pete's cautious whistle outside. She went to the window. Pete, Don, and Gil were below, holding a blanket. She went over to the window ledge, dropped.

Dawn saw four tired but happy folk come clattering into Pimola. They went right to the home of the Reverend Dwight Barnum and after a short stay indoors came out, smiling and very talkative.

"I got enough on my drawin' account in the bank here for a trip to Frisco an' Los Angeles," Pete told Gil and Don.

"If you ain't we'll put in checks," Don offered, but Pete, always thrifty, shook his head.

"I got enough. So long. I'd wish you both good luck, but that would mean wishin' you a better woman than I've got, an' I won't do that, because there ain't none," with a new husband's positiveness.

They chaffed with the bride and groom all through the wedding breakfast, saw them aboard the train, and then Gil and Don turned back toward Rangeland, after arranging to have Pete's and Wanda's horses cared for in Pimola, for the two planned to return via that town and ride in to Bar O X from there.

"There; one's gone. Now to 'tend to your case, Gil," Don said as they sat down in the hotel when all their pressing duties were taken care of.

"How 'bout you, old-timer?" affectionately. "Where do you get off at? Got a girl in sight?"

"I'll not say a word," quietly. "It's 'bout time we rode fo' Bar Z L."

Gil assented, and the two started off on their quest.

All three had avoided the jail during their stay, for Pete, with instinctive goodness of heart, did not wish the fallen plotter to be witness to his happiness; also he did not wish to be in the position of a man who gloats over his defeated enemy.

The next day Vrayne's sister arrived in town from Lightning and engaged a skilled lawyer to defend her brother. In the privacy of the office, the lawyer shook his head over the case, although he promised to do his best in return for the big fee that he knew was forthcoming.

Next day Vrayne was found dead in his cell. A thunderclap of apoplexy had saved the law the work of removing him from the busy scenes of life.

Meanwhile, speeding toward the coast, Pete and Wanda found life interesting and golden. And Gil and Don, upon their quest, had before them many adventure-flecked hours before they came to the parting of the ways.

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

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Mispickel

By Reginald C. Barker

Author of "The Secret of Yellow Jacket Spring," "A Rattler's Luck," etc.

AS the auto stage wound its way between the huge piles of gravel that flanked the road upon either side, the heart of its single passenger beat a little faster than usual.

"So this is where the gold miners of the early 'sixties made such immense fortunes, is it?" he inquired of the driver.

"Some of 'em did, an', ag'in, some of 'em didn't," was the equivocal reply. "Take 'Bright Metal' Johnny, now; he shoveled in a thousan' bucks a day for several weeks, but what good did it do him, I ask yuh? In them days gold was easy to get an' easy to spend in these parts, what with the saloons, dance halls, an' the like. Naw, Johnny's clean-up didn't do him a killin' sight o' good. The follerin' summer he was swampin' for 'One-eyed' Kelly that run the 'Miner's Hope.' "

"But they weren't all like that, surely," expostulated Harley Cannon. "Some of them probably saved the fortunes they made."

Deftly steering the car around a huge boulder which had rolled down into the road from one of the gravel piles, the stage driver replied:

"Yeh, some of 'em did, but not many. There was ole Mis' Carlin, now; she took in washin' to support the fambly while Steve was prospectin' on Hoodlum Creek. Three years she done washin' 'fore her ole man struck it rich. Then the next thing we knowed the whole push of 'em hit the trail for Yurrup, an' they never did come back. No, siree; I guess they are in Yurrup yet."

"I suppose," said Harley, "a fellow could still find ground that has never been mined?"

"Sure," was the reply, "there's plenty of it."

"I wish I could find some," said Harley.

"Thinkin' of doin' a little prospectin', are yuh?" asked the stage driver.

"That's what I came here for."

The stage driver looked thoughtful.

"Tell yuh what yuh'd better do," he said at last; "yuh talk to 'Silent' Simmons, the storekeeper at Hoggem. Likely he'll be able to help yuh out. He has lots of ground, has Silent Simmons." Then the car swept around a bend in the road, and a dilapidated collection of unpainted shacks came into view.

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"Hoggem!" said the stage driver. "It's as far as we go."

Silent Simmons, who combined in his person the offices of storekeeper, postmaster, and hotel keeper, belied his name; he was not silent, not by a jugful. Harley Cannon had not been ten minutes in the low frame building that answered as a lounging place to the few inhabitants of the old mining camp before he found himself subjected to a running fire of questions regarding his business in the community.

Satisfied at last that Harley was neither interested in apprehending any of the inhabitants who disagreed with the principles embodied in the Volstead Act nor in any manner whatever connected with officialdom, Silent Simmons turned the conversation to mining. Here he found a willing listener, and it was not long before he learned that Harley had come West with the object of making a stake.

Curious to relate, Silent Simmons immediately remembered that he had a property which he designated as the "Mispickel Claim." Owing to press of business, he was unable to work it.

He was "gettin' old," he intimated, and for that reason, coupled with the fact that his business took most of his spare time, he would be willing—in fact, he would take a great pleasure—in assisting a young fellow like Harley to acquire a stake.

How much would he take for his claim? Well, now, considering that the sluice boxes were already set, and that all Harley would have to do was to turn in the water and go to cleaning up, five hundred dollars would be the best he could do.

"But I have only one hundred and eleven dollars in the world," said Harley, "so I guess I shall have to prospect until I find some new ground."

Silent Simmons rubbed his chin. "I wouldn't do it," he advised. "First thing yuh know, yuh won't have neither money nor claim; then where'll yuh be at? That's what I want to know—then where'll yuh be at?" Not knowing, Harley kept silent.

"Tell yuh what I'll do," offered Silent Simmons at last. "I'll lease yuh the Mispickel Claim for two months for one hundred dollars."

Harley shook his head. "I'll have to buy supplies and tools," he objected.

"Tools!" snorted Silent Simmons. "Ain't there a pick an' a shovel up there? What kind of a man do yuh think I am," he inquired belligerently, "to objec' to yuh usin' my pick an' shovel? An' talkin' about grub, yuh'll have eleven dollars left. Sufferin' cats, man, how much grub are yuh figgerin' on eatin'?"

"But I haven't even seen the claim," objected Harley weakly.

Silent Simmons turned to the stage driver, who was an interested listener.

"Ain't I a man of my word, Ben?" he demanded self-righteously. "Yuh tell the stranger, Ben."

"I guess if he says he'll lease yuh the Mispickel, he'll do it, all right," affirmed the stage driver.

"How much gold do you suppose I can dig out in a day?" Harley asked.

"Depends on how many hours yuh work," replied Silent Simmons. "Now, if it was me, an' I was young again, I'd work from sunup till sundown. Yeh, don't know but what I'd work till after sundown."

"Can I make five dollars a day?" persisted Harley.

"I've made ten in half a day," announced Silent Simmons; then he turned again to the stage driver. "Ain't I made ten in half a day, Ben?"

"I guess yuh have, Silent," agreed that worthy.

"How about a cabin?" said Harley.

Silent Simmons raised his eyes to the fly-specked ceiling. "Didn't I spend a hundred dollars an' two weeks buildin' a cabin on the Mispickel? Barrin' a

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pane o' glass or so missin' from the window, ain't it a good cabin?" he demanded.

"How do I know that there is gold in the ground?" inquired Harley doubtfully.

Silent Simmons doubled his fist and shook it in his face. "Don't yuh go to insinnivatin' that I'm a liar," he said. "Don't yuh do it now."

Harley laughed good-naturedly. "I'm not," he said; "but I don't want to buy a pig in a poke."

Mollified by the young man's laugh, Silent Simmons said: "Well, I'll take a gold pan an' go along with yuh after dinner, an' yuh can see for yuhrself."

That there was gold on the claim was evident that afternoon when Silent Simmons arose from his knees by the ditch where he had panned out some gravel he had dug from beneath the overhang of a bank.

"Now are yuh satisfied?" he demanded.

"All right, Mr. Simmons," said Harley, "you make out the papers leasing the Mispickel Claim to me for two months for the sum of one hundred dollars."

"Papers!" exploded Silent Simmons. "Ain't the word of a gent like me good enough?"

But Harley was firm. He would either take a signed and witnessed lease, or he would not take the claim.

Consequently, the stage driver scratched his signature at the bottom of the document by which Harley Cannon became to all intents and purposes the owner of the Mispickel Claim for two months.

At the best of times eleven dollars is not enough for grub to feed a young and healthy man for two months. At the prices Harley found himself compelled to pay, it seemed doubtful if the scanty supply of pork, beans, flour, coffee, and sugar would run him one month. But Harley thought that by working hard he would soon be able to earn enough to buy more supplies.

During the following week he worked fourteen hours each day shoveling the yellow gravel into the rushing stream of water which he had turned into the sluice boxes from the old ditch upon the hill above.

Harley was not a miner, but by talking to various old-timers who visited the claim out of curiosity during those first few days he soon learned the rudiments of the game. He did not notice that none seemed very enthusiastic when he mentioned that he intended to make a trial clean-up at the end of the week.

Saturday came at last, and, trembling with excitement, Harley removed the riffles from the sluice boxes, as he had been advised to do, and then he forked out the largest bits of such gravel as remained, subsequently panning out the residue with his gold pan.

Eagerly he watched as the lighter sand drifted over the edge of the pan when he circled it in his hands. At last nothing remained in the pan but a handful of black sand, among which was mixed a great deal of a whitish metal that somewhat resembled tin—and a half dozen specks of gold.

Pan after pan Harley washed out, until at last the sluice boxes were empty and clean. Then he looked at the result of his week's work and whistled in dismay.

In the tin cup, into which he had put his pannings, lay a spoonful of the whitish metal, among which gleamed a few yellow specks.

"I wonder if I'm stung?" thought Harley. "Still, that silver ought to be worth something; funny thing Mr. Simmons didn't mention that I might find silver."

The more he thought about it, the more Harley determined that he had accidentally stumbled onto a silver mine.

"Guess I'll go down to the store and

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see if I can exchange some of it for a few things I need," he muttered at last.

"I'd like a few pounds of beef, Mr. Simmons," he told the storekeeper, "and if it is all the same to you, I'll pay for it out of my week's clean-up."

"Huh! What's that? Clean-up!" was the astounded exclamation of Silent Simmons as he stared hard at Harley.

"Well, there wasn't very much gold so far," acknowledged the young prospector, "but there was a great deal of silver."

Silent Simmons laughed, a cruel, twisty laugh that made his fat jowls quiver like jelly.

"Let's see yuhr silver," he demanded. "That ain't silver!" he exclaimed derisively as he handed back the little "clean-up" to Harley. "That's nothin' but mispickel! It ain't worth the powder to blow it across the river."

"Mispickel!" repeated Harley. "I don't believe I ever heard of it."

"Yeh, mispickel," sneered Silent Simmons; "mispickel from the Mispickel Claim!" and he put his hands upon his hips and, tilting his head back, roared his delight with laughter that shook the roof.

Harley's face turned red, then paled with anger as he realized that he had been roundly swindled.

"I fail either to understand you or to see the joke," he quietly said at last.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Silent Simmons. "Mispickel is iron pyrites. Out here in the West we calls it fools' gold."

"But I always thought that fools' gold was yellow," said Harley.

"There's two kinds, kid," explained Silent Simmons. "The yellow is pyrites of iron, the white is arsenopyrites of iron, or what yuh might call white iron. It is commonly known as mispickel."

"How do you know that this is white iron?" demanded Harley. "Have you ever had it assayed?"

"Assayed? No! 'Tain't wuth the price, kid; every one around here knows about the Mispickel Claim."

"Then you knew this when you leased me the claim, did you?" asked Harley.

"I sure did, kid; if I hadn't taken yuhr money, yuh'd hev fooled it away, anyhow. What in time do yuh know about prospectin'?"

"Not very much, I'm afraid," answered Harley quietly. Then he smiled. "I'm game to take my medicine just the same," he announced.

Silent Simmons stared. "Yuh mean that yuh ain't goin' to quit the Mispickel?" he demanded incredulously.

"Not until my two months are up, anyway," said Harley.

"I knowed yuh was a fool the first time I seen yuh, kid," said Silent Simmons, "but yuh're a bigger fool than I thought yuh was."

How Harley Cannon lived upon flour and beans—and mighty little, at that—does not matter. At the end of two months he left the claim with nothing but a tiny sack of white metal to show for his grueling work. As for the Mispickel Claim, itself, it automatically reverted to Silent Simmons.

Two months later, a tall, quiet young man of perhaps twenty-five years descended from the stage and walked into the hotel-store-post-office building of Silent Simmons.

"A real mining camp!" he remarked quite audibly to himself. "A real mining camp."

Silent Simmons hurried forward, wagging his fat jowls, and extended a clublike paw. "Glad to know yuh, sir," he beamed. "Yeh, Hoggem is one of the placer camps in the West where a man can make a stake."

"Queer name—Hoggem," mused the stranger.

"Yeh, sir," agreed Silent Simmons. "She got her name in the early sixties. A bunch of fellers came in an' hogged

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all the best of the ground an' then moved along to better diggin's."

"I see. Don't suppose you know of a piece of ground that was not hogged, and that a man could get at a reasonable price!"

Silent Simmons rubbed the red stubble on his flabby jowls. "Well," he said at last, "there's a little property belongin' to me that is called the Mispickel Claim. It's a good property, too; but, yuh see, I'm gettin' old, an' what with my business an' age an' all, I ain't got time to work it myself." He paused suggestively.

"You look like a square man," said the stranger thoughtfully, "but of course I would like to make an investigation before I commit myself to buying. About what would you consider a fair price for the claim, should it come up to my requirements?"

"Well, sir, seeing that the sluice boxes are already set, an' all yuh would have to do would be to go to shovelin', I couldn't consider less than five hundred dollars," announced Silent Simmons.

That afternoon the stranger accompanied Silent Simmons to the Mispickel Claim and watched a streak of yellow appear at the bottom of a pan that Silent Simmons whirled in his hands beneath his big cigar.

"It seems a little lean," said the stranger at last, "but I've always wanted to own a mine out here in the West, so if you will have the papers prepared, I guess I'll buy the claim. Mind you," he added, "I want an absolutely clear title."

Silent Simmons hugged himself inwardly. At last he had gotten rid of the Mispickel Claim. "Yes, Mr.—er—what did yuh say yuhr name was?"

"Tulliver, sir; James Q. Tulliver, of Pittsburgh."

Three days later Mr. James Q. Tulliver carefully folded a deed to the Mispickel Claim and placed it in his inside pocket. "Guess I'll be leaving on the stage this afternoon, Mr. Simmons," he said quietly.

"Leavin'!" exclaimed Silent Simmons in amazement. "Ain't yuh a-goin' to work the Mispickel?"

"Not until I have reported to Mr. Cannon," replied Tulliver.

"But I don't—I don't understand," quavered Silent Simmons.

"During Mr. Cannon's lease of the Mispickel Claim," explained Tulliver, "he made such a good clean-up that he decided to buy the claim."

"Clean-up!" exploded Silent Simmons. "There ain't been any gold to amount to shucks found on the Mispickel for forty years."

"Probably only that which you flicked off the end of your loaded cigar while you were panning for my benefit the other day," said Tulliver.

Silent Simmons ignored the insinuation. "Then what in time did he clean up?" he asked.

Tulliver smiled a wintry smile. "You call it mispickel," he said, "but there were seventeen ounces of platinum mixed in with it! And you know platinum is worth at the present time one hundred and twelve dollars per ounce!"

Silent Simmons swallowed hard. "But what have yuh got to do with it?" he asked at last.

The stranger laughed as he boarded the stage. "That's easy," he said. "I'm acting under power of attorney for Harley Cannon."

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Top Hand or Nothing

By
Harley P. Lathrop

Author of "The Horse and the 'Man'," "Galloped Into Place," etc.

N early spring sun shone refulgently down, tinting with golden splendor the dingy tents of a street carnival which was parked on a vacant lot in a small Southern city. Filling most of the space between the rear wall and the armor-plate shield of the carnival's shooting gallery, two immature youths, waifs of a floating world, lay in comfortable proximity.

"Listen to this here, Slippery. Here's a line of straight dope."

"Limpy" screwed up his face and, a grubby finger tracing each line, read with laborious effort.

"The crying need of to-day is for men, men with vision. The great and glorious golden West, where bountiful nature has distributed her favors with lavish hand, pleads for home seekers. The beautiful valleys, dotted with incomparable fruit farms, the rocky hillsides where only a scratch is needed to uncover storehouses of gold and silver, the vast, open spaces where graze thousands of head of contented cattle, clamor for men and still more men. Why be a scurrying ant, a mere nonentity among millions? Why toil in the humdrum existence of a smoke-filled city? Why be a cog in a man-made machine when glorious nature beckons? Why——"

"That will be about enough," "Slippery" disgustedly interrupted. "The guy that put out that spiel gives me an acute pain. I been West myself. I been in Indiana twice. I didn't see no incomparable fruit farms nestling in valleys, or any ranches filled with cattle. All I seen was just like everywhere else—common-looking country, and a lot of hicks and come-on's who didn't look like bounteous nature was handing them an easy livin'. They looked like hard work and plenty of it."

Limpy gave a disdainful snort expressive of huge disgust. "You're sure ignorant, Slippery," he derisively observed. "A little more schoolin' wouldn't have hurt you none. Indiana is chicken feed alongside of the places this guy means. He's talkin' about the far West, where you ain't never been."

"Where ain't I been?" Slippery shot forth a belligerent question. "I been traveling over the country with this carnival for four years."

"He's talkin' about Texas and California and the bad lands and wild places like that," Limpy wearily explained, delving deep into his vague geographical knowledge.

"Aw, that guy's nuts. What you're readin' is just a come-on, only, instead of barkin' it from in front of a tent, he spiels it off on paper."

Slippery disdainfully picked up the

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folder whose fulsome praises of the Far West had been conceived in the fertile brain of some enthusiastic publicity man, and eyed its lurid cover with a contempt born of hard-wrung knowledge.

"That's a bunk game, Limpy, me lad. Chances are the goof that did that spielin' is mouthpiece for some railroad company. They're always trying to frame you for transportation money."

"Well, they ain't barkin' at a jay crowd this time," Limp contemptuously declared. I ain't payin' out good money as long as freights is runnin'."

"You don't mean to say you're fall guy for that line of stuff, do you?" demanded Slippery, the scorn in his voice slightly tinctured with awe.

Limpy bobbed his head emphatically. "I got twenty dollars hid out, and that'll buy grub to where I'm goin'."

"And where might that be?" his companion inquired, his curiosity now fully aroused by the other's conclusive manner.

"I'm goin' to Texas and be a cowboy," Limpy stated with fervor.

Slippery lost himself in a roar of ironic laughter. "Whoever heard of a gimp-legged cowboy?" he jeered, displaying all the unthinking callousness of youth. "The mob I was with before I joined out with this one had a Bill show and cowboys. They wasn't none of them had one leg shorter than the other. Those birds was real tough guys —wore six-guns and everything."

"So'll I wear a pistol. I can shoot, can't I?" Limpy demanded.

"Yeh, I'll hand it to you," Slippery generously conceded, a trace of envy in his voice. "You got a natural gift that way."

"Well, I guess I can learn to ride a horse then," Limpy declared with fixed decisiveness. "All I got to do is to have one stirrup shortened, or somethin'. Once when I was a little feller and my dad was livin', he had an extension put on a shoe for me. You couldn't hardly tell I was lame at all," Limpy said wistfully.

Slippery, his callous skepticism veering to quick sympathy, nodded. "I seen a guy's fixed like that," he said. "But listen," he pressed, still in the grip of the awesome marveling his friend's former declaration had aroused. "Honest, you ain't goin' to jump the show jest at the start of spring and do like you said?"

Limpy, inwardly pleased at the need of respect his professed intention had won from his companion, nodded emphatically. "You bet," he said. Then, in response to the urgent call of a buzzer operated from the front of the shooting gallery, he began to turn a crank which, geared to an intricate system of cogs and belts, started in motion the elusive clay pigeons.

The other, still gazing at him, his eyes murky with doubt, prepared to depart. "When I see it, I'll believe it," was his parting shot as he dove for the outside.

All that day and till long after midnight, Limpy sat in the cramped space between the armor plate and the tent wall, intermittently turning the crank at buzzed commands from the front. And the dull thud of the bullets and the staccato barks of the small-caliber pistols penetrated his consciousness not at all. He was silently revolving in his mind, and living with all the untamed sanguineness of youth, the entrancing scenes pictured in the book which had accidentally fallen into his hands.

The following Saturday night, when the small carnival was in the throes of disruption preparing for another jump, Limpy sought his friend. "Well, I've quit," he announced in a determined, if somewhat shaky, voice.

Slippery gazed at him in unfeigned admiration. "Honest, you don't mean to say you're goin'?"

Limpy nodded.

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"Got my pay, and I'm pulling out on the next freight."

The other looked his incredulous wonder, mouth agape, eyes popping, too utterly dumfounded for words. "Well, so long," Limpy said in simple farewell and, turning, hitched his way through the tangled mass of ropes and tentings.

A few hours later a slight youth with a pronounced limp, his form bulged and lumpy from much canned edibles, boarded a westbound freight.

A little, one-cylinder alarm clock, hanging against the tailboard of the chuck wagon, exploded with a metallic bang. The mechanism which was designed to shut off the unholy clatter, long since had succumbed to the cook's heavy hand, so he muffled it as best he could under a pillow. He lay back in his blankets until the clock gave its last expiring click. Then with a groan he crawled from beneath the warm coverings and donned what few clothes he had discarded upon retiring. Lifting aside the canvas, which, draping the wagon's back, shut out the piercing night air, he poked forth a bald head and gave a cursory glance at the weather signs.

A chill breath of wind swept around the wagon, the expiring gasp of a belated norther. Overhead, the stars shone brightly, each standing apart by itself, their gleaming radiance as prominent as a flaming coal against a drapery of sable velvet.

From underneath and about the wagon came a series of raucous, long-drawn snores emanating from a number of inanimate, cocoonlike mounds.

With muttered objurgations directed at the nipping air, the cook fumbled around in his blankets until he rescued a moth-eaten cap adorned with earlaps which were carefully tied back across the top. Pulling this, his badge of office, well down on his shining dome, he eased his two-hundred-odd pounds gruntingly over the tailboard. With ponderous steps he waddled around the wagon, scanning the tarpaulin-covered cocoons closely. Finally locating the desired heap, he prodded it roughly with his toe. The chrysalis within the covering stirred restlessly, and a succession of vicious curses hurtled from its depths.

"Outside for the day wrangler," the cook rasped and, ceasing his toe-prodding efforts, bent over and stripped back the tarp. A sleep-drugged puncher, sputtering matter-of-fact imprecations at the weather, his job, the cook, and what not, began slowly tugging on a pair of damp boots. Satisfied that the unlucky wight was fully awake, the cook turned away.

A short distance off, like gleaming eyes in a gray cat's face, a few live coals winked in a bed of dead ashes. Toward this beacon waddled the cook. He took several steps, paused, and came to a full stop with the hesitating slowness of a two-ton truck. Screwing up his eyes, he strove to pierce the intense, blanketing darkness which always precedes the dawn.

"Now where in the name of Pedro's two-tailed mule did that come from?" he gasped in wheezy surprise.

Hugging the remains of the fire, humped over the small bed of coals, soaking in what faint heat arose, sat a small, slight figure, sound asleep.

After his first burst of astonishment had passed, the cook lumbered forward and shook the unconscious figure gently. The boy, his face cruelly hunger-drawn and pale, awoke with a start.

"And where by all that's holy might you have dropped from?" demanded the cook, undiluted astonishment registered in his voice.

The boy smiled at him rather wanly. "They told me your outfit was workin' out this way, and I been two days tryin' to find you. I saw your fire a long ways off, and when I got here you

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was all asleep, so I thought I wouldn't wake you up. Mister, I'm lookin' for a job."

"Well," asked the cook, smothering an inward smile at the presumptuous innocence of the lad, "before you get it, how about a little coffee and some cold biscuits? You look like it wouldn't hurt you none."

"It'll go right good with me," answered the boy. "I ain't been eatin' any too regular since I left the carnival."

"You go over to that wagon"—the cook pointed to the dim outline of the "hoodlum wagon," which was parked near by—"and drag out an armful of wood. In the meantime, I'll see what I can do with this fire." While the youth went for wood, the cook bent over the coals and with much labored puffing and blowing coaxed the smoldering embers into a feeble flame. He straightened and watched the boy, who was staggering back laden with a weighty load.

"What's the matter, kid? Hurt your leg?" he solicitously inquired, noting the limping gait.

The darkness veiled the sensitive blush which any mention of his deformity always brought to the boy's face.

"No, sir," he said. "One of my legs is shorter than the other. I was born that way. Do you think—do you think," he asked after a visible pause of constraint, "that it will make any difference in my learning to be a cowboy?"

"Naw," answered the cook, hiding under an assumed gruffness of manner the little pang of sympathy the naïve question brought. "A little thing like that ain't going to hurt you none. I seen plenty of top hands a sight worse crippled than what you are. Here, pour this into you, and I'll rustle up some cold biscuits."

As the boy, a pint cup of scalding hot coffee in one hand and a slab of cold biscuits in the other, sat quietly by the fire watching the cook deftly throw together the ingredients for the morning breakfast, there was a contented smile on his drawn face. "This is something like," he thought. He knew he would land with the right outfit in the end. What if every other ranch to which he had hopefully applied had fed him up and started him on his way? That was all in the past. Here was the place where he was going to stick. The cook was a prince of a fellow, and from that it followed the big boss must be the same. This was a whole lot better than cranking clay pigeons in a traveling shooting gallery, he'd tell the world!

An hour afterward, full to repletion, a great light of hope on his face, he was answering the questions of a slightly amused and somewhat worried foreman. "No, sir, there ain't nobody cares where I am. My folks is all dead. My name is Jimmy Calhoun, but mostly they calls me 'Limpy,'" and he held out a pair of skinny legs for the foreman's inspection. "I was born that way, sir. It ain't going to hurt me none for ridin', is it?" he interrogated with an intense show of anxiety.

There was a gleam of troubled speculation in Tom Miller's eyes as he slowly shook his head.

Here was a pretty kettle of fish. The Seven H outfit was no place for an undersized lad, a crippled lad, at that. Doing mostly all open range work, it took a man to stand up to the daily grind. And again, they were the last outfit in the country to bother with a green hand, though he be burly and sound as a trivet. If the kid—bless his soul; he had plenty of nerve, anyway—was at the ranch, now, he might find something for him to do until he got him fed up. Then, with a collection from the hands, he could start him on his way with a few well-chosen words of advice concerning the futility of his trying to become a cowboy.

The crew, waiting for the day's

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remuda to be driven in, watched their foreman's discomfiture with ill-concealed elation. It was seldom indeed that anything happened to get Tom Miller in a quandary. The cook became more and more restive as he noted the studied thoughtfulness in the foreman's eyes. His vast bulk concealing a heart as tender as a woman's, he had conceived an almost instant liking for the nervy little cripple. Moving ponderously, he planted his massive bulk close to Tom Miller.

"How about giving him a chance to drive the hoodlum wagon?" he hoarsely suggested. "That will give you the extra hand you been wailin' for ever since we been out."

The veiled look of indecision which had clouded the foreman's eyes lessened, and he turned hopefully to Limpy. "Do you reckon you could drive the hoodlum wagon, son?" he asked.

Limpy unlimbered his wistful smile. "I don't know what the hoodlum wagon is, mister," he said, "but I can drive it."

Tom Miller nodded with unsmiling gravity. "All right, kid," he said, "you can try it. Cook, there, will show you the ropes and kinda get you started." Turning to the hand who had heretofore occupied that ignominious position, he added: "You, Ed, cut a string out of the extra bunch and take over the night wrangler's job. I'll put him on days, and the day man on the crew."

In the weeks which followed, Limpy proudly chauffeured the hoodlum wagon. And all conceded that the man fitted the job. The fat cook swore by him. Never were there such quantities and such good wood in all his years of feeding hungry cow crews. And Limpy wasn't afraid to help an old man out, either. Wasn't always playin' off like most flunkies. Had no objection to soilin' his hands with a little dishwater now and then, which was more than the cook could say for Limpy's predecessor. Yes, the lad was there, all right!

And the crew agreed with the cook. They admitted themselves that they no longer had to hold a herd of bawling calves and their restless mothers under a broiling hot sun while waiting for a dilatory hoodlum wagon to appear with wood for the branding fire. And they couldn't ask for hotter irons, either. Yes, take it all in all, Limpy was a huge success.

"That kid's going to make a cow hand, too, one of these days," huskily asserted the cook. "He's got a way with hosses, and that is a sight more than most of you waddies can say. Lookit them jugheads that draws his wagon. Gentle as kittens now. He can catch 'em anywhere on the prairie and don't have a mite of trouble gearing 'em up. They ain't been on the prod, not once, since he's been driving 'em. Travel along like a team of woolly lambs. Yes, sir, anybody that can gentle a pair of mules like Limpy has done, is got a way with hosses."

Spurred on by his enthusiasm, the cook wheedled the use of an old but well-broken cow pony from the foreman. This he kept on a stake rope near camp, supplementing the scant grass he picked up by a daily ration of oats filched from the meager supply kept for the cutting horses. And it was on this aged relic that Limpy received his first lessons in riding.

With wheezed instructions, interposed with caustic comments, the cook loaded his pupil with all the finer points pertaining to the game; taught him how to saddle and mount correctly; how to check and ease his horse on a turn; how to head; and how to drive a cow. Then with a rope he proceeded to put the final touches on Limpy's education. When the day came that his pupil, riding at a mad run, could drop a loop expertly over an upright stick and check his horse before the rope had tautened

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enough to pull the stick down, cook pronounced Limpy's education complete in so far as he could make it.

"All you want now is practice," he confided to the youth. "But you'll be ready when you get your chance. You can't never tell when one of these buckeroos will make up his mind to quit. 'Course, you ain't never rode nothing that jumped, or roped anything runnin', but that'll come easy with a little practice."

And so Limpy, as glorious as a king on the seat of the hoodlum wagon, waited for the day when he would get his longed-for opportunity to show his worth. And it was Fate, in the form of a bluebottle fly and a rattlesnake, which interceded for him.

One Sunday afternoon in late spring Limpy's chance came and in an unexpected manner. The crew the night before had saddled up and departed for town, lured by the promised excitement of a dance. Even the cook, his ancient and weighty body driven by the call of spring wanderlust, had crawled cumbersomely on a horse and departed to visit a neighboring outfit. Limpy and the foreman were left holding down the camp.

Limpy was busy at some trifling duty about the wagons, and the foreman, stretched at length in the scant shade afforded by a scraggly weesach bush, lay half asleep. Sunk in a pleasant lethargy, he failed to heed a dry rustling coming from the base of the weesach. Then, out from the stunted clump of prickly pear which grew around the roots of the shrub, crawled a flat-headed, diamond-mottled snake. Verily, the grandfather of all his tribe was he, with a body the size of a man's wrist and sporting a battered, time-scarred string of rattles which betokened great age. Bound for a near-by alkali spot where he was accustomed to take his daily sunning, he was in a mood to brook no opposition. He wormed stealthily along, his repellent head slightly elevated, with the intention of circling a freshly fallen log which barred his path.

Just then, in the course of his vagrant wanderings, a large bluebottle fly alighted upon the foreman's face and started on a tour of investigation. With the unconscious movement of one half dreaming, half awake, the foreman raised his hand to brush away the fly.

At the motion, the snake, with a slithery, repulsive, but none-the-less instantaneous, movement, slid into a coil. Menacingly, warningly, came that indescribable sound—once heard, never forgotten—the dry, penetrating *whir-r-r* of an angry rattler.

In frozen immobility Tom Miller lay, his hand slightly elevated above his chin. Out of the tail of an unblinking eye he could see the snake. Ugly head upraised from the fat coils of the diamond-blotched body; little, beady eyes transfixed on the foreman's face; his tail, with a rapidity which baffled the eye, quivered out its deadly warning.

Tom Miller knew his danger. His bare, sunburned neck, exposed by the open collar of his shirt, offered an inviting target for the poison-filled fangs. Full well, also, the foreman knew that, while a rattler's venom is not necessarily fatal if injected into one of the extremities of the body, let one once sink its fangs in close proximity to the jugular vein, and death is the inevitable result.

These thoughts flashed like lightning through his brain as he lay tensed, watching the threatening snake.

The rattler, now satisfied it was no log of wood which barred his path, remained coiled in waiting watchfulness. At every involuntary blinking of the foreman's eye, his tail whirred its menacing warning. But, true to the one gentlemanly instinct of his species,

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some queer trait of nature's placing, he waited for his enemy to make the first move.

Tom Miller, staring a horrible death in the face, made up his mind that he would play Fate's grim jest to a finish. He realized that there was a limit to the time he could keep his hand upraised. Sooner or later it would grow numb, the paralyzed muscles of his arm refuse to act, and the hand would fall. When it did, the needle-sharp fangs would pierce the quivering neck. And then to him would come all the tortures of the damned. Nerved by the inbred fatalism of the plainsman, he determined to put into effect the only plan he could devise.

With this idea in mind, lips immobile, from one corner of his mouth he called "Limpy!" The word came forth, smothered and indistinct.

From the far side of the chuck wagon answered a clear "Yes, sir."

"Limpy," the cool, unmoved voice of the foreman went on, "stay where you are till I finish. There is a rattler coiled not two feet from my face. It's a hundred-to-one shot that taps will sound for me, son, but I'm going to gamble on that one chance. I want you to do this for me and do it mighty quick. My belt and gun," the muffled voice explained, "are in my bed-roll. Get the gun and ease up along the wagon. Come quietly so you won't alarm the snake. When you get close enough, I'll give the word, and you toss the gun within reach of my right hand. Do you understand?"

Again came the "Yes, sir," but the voice was quavery and broken.

"Well, hurry now. My hand is getting mighty heavy, and I don't want it to get numb."

Tom Miller, jaws tight clenched, waited with the stoicism of his kind until Limpy would return and he could have his fling with Fate.

With the casting of the gun toward him, he would make a blind grasp for the sinister head. If luck favored him and the act was timed exactly, he might receive the fangs in his hand instead of in the vital spot exposed by the open collar of his shirt. If not—well, with the gun handy, he would never suffer all the torments of the damned. And, providing the snake did strike his hand, the hundredth chance was his. Of course, he would suffer excruciating agony and perhaps in the long run lose his arm, but that was far better than dying. Life at that particular juncture loomed sweetly to Tom Miller.

With these thoughts racing through his mind, fearing to bat an eye, he lay waiting for the boy to give notice he had found the gun. To the foreman the time lagged fearfully. His upraised hand was like lead, and he could feel a warning numbness stealing up his arm. Was ever any one so slow as Limpy?

The sun had now topped the weesach bush, and it shone full in his face. He slowly closed his eyes to shut out the blinding rays, praying the snake would not strike at the action. The whirring buzz still rose intermittently from beside his ear. At last there came a slight noise from near the wagon.

"That you, Limpy?" he called hopefully.

Once again the voice answered "Yes, sir."

"Well, get ready," he directed. "When I count three, on the last word toss the gun as near my right hand as you can. Now ready, son, one, two——"

There came a sharp, unexpected report from the wagon. A twisting, contorting mess of coils, as chill as death's icy finger, flopped aimlessly against and over Tom Miller's face. But there came no red-hot prick of fangs.

Rolling away, the foreman bounded quickly to his feet. There lay the snake, his head half severed by a bullet, writhing in a repulsive tangle on the ground.

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Tom Miller whirled toward the wagon. Limpy stood, gun in hand, a little, abashed grin lurking on his face. "Son, you didn't—you didn't——" demanded the astounded foreman, too nonplused for words.

Limpy nodded shyly. "It looked like the only way out to me," he said.

And still Tom Miller stared, first at the boy and the gun, then at the twisting body of the snake.

"Thank Heaven you took a chance!" he impulsively exclaimed, wiping the icy beads of sweat from his forehead.

"Aw, 'twasn't no chance," Limpy volunteered. "I did it on purpose."

"You what?" demanded Tom. Limpy looked the picture of self-consciousness. "You see, I got a natural gift that way," he explained, and, raising the gun, he aimed at an empty tin can which lay some twenty yards away from the wagon. Four times the pistol barked, and four times the shining bit of tin jumped convulsively.

Tom Miller eyed the youth with an air of unbelieving wonder. "But where——"

"I worked in a shooting gallery with a traveling carnival once," Limpy explained, "and that's where I learned."

Once again the foreman's eyes traveled from the youth to the snake, now lifeless, and then back to the youth. He took several steps forward and placed an affectionate arm around the embarrassed Limpy's shoulders.

"Son," he said, "you've got a life to your credit, and it's going to be a mighty hard thing for me to repay. Tell me something, though. Tell me what you'd like most. Some new clothes, an education—what?"

Limpy wriggled uncomfortably out from under the foreman's arm. He looked at him in obvious indecision, opened his mouth, then closed it again. Finally gathering his courage, he blurted forth: "Mr. Tom, the seat of that hoodlum wagon is getting terrible hard. I've learned to ride pretty good, and the first time they's a wrangling job open I wish you would remember me."

From then on, Limpy, his cup brimming with happiness, held the proud position of night herder.

As spring blended into summer, the work on the outside range drew to a close. The Seven H outfit was headed homeward. With them they carried a beef herd gathered from the range, also a bunch of half-wild brood mares from the foothills—planning to brand their colts at the ranch.

Limpy, saddling his horse preparatory to taking over the riding bunch from the day wrangler, was receiving instructions from his foreman.

"I don't like throwing those crazy brood mares in with our saddle remuda," Tom Miller was saying, "but that's the easiest way to hold them tonight. We will make the ranch tomorrow, and after we brand we can turn them out and get shut of them again. You and the day wrangler drift both bunches together, haze them across to Dry Island, and you can night herd there. We will camp and hold the cattle directly opposite."

Dry Island was a peculiar, though not unusual, formation for that broken country. A narrow, rectangular piece of ground comprising possibly twenty acres, it stood in solitary grandeur, bisecting the exact center of a river's bed, which, except in case of torrential rains in the mountains above, was invariably dry. The upstream end of the island brought up in a precipitous bluff, scoured smooth by spring floods. It was impossible to ascend and almost as impossible of descent. The island gradually planed off, sloping gently down, the lower end merging into the river's bed.

It was an ideal place to night herd. The upper end of the island was thickly carpeted with tender grass. The high

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banks acted as a natural barricade. No horse would attempt to clamber down the steep declivity. On either side the banks were equally as bluff for more than halfway the length of the island. A rider stationed midway of the strip had only the breadth of the narrow island to watch.

With the help of the day wrangler, Limpy drove the horses across the dry bed of the river and well up toward the head of the island. The saddle bunch, accustomed to the spot from former usage, were well content and fell to grazing peaceably. Not so the brood mares. Nervous, restless, uneasy, unused to being herded, they warily circled the precipitous banks. A few pops of a whip, when they came toward the lower end of the island where the banks were less steep, sent them scurrying back to the other horses.

It was dusk by now, and Limpy could see faintly through the gloom the herd of beef cattle on the opposite bank. The riders were circling them into a mill preparatory to halting them at the bedding grounds. Close by the edge of the river's bank the white bulk of the chuck wagon upreared in ghostly silhouette. Beside it the open fire—a flickering, dancing pyramid of light—was intermittently obscured as the hefty form of the cook moved about it. Occasionally, with a muffled softness, would come the musical click of pot against pan.

Limpy, one eye on the horses, listened in dreamy contentment to these cheerful sounds of camp life. The mares had joined the other horses and were grazing quietly. Gradually, the fire dimmed, died out; the faint camp sounds stilled; in somber, brooding silence, the night wore on.

Yonder in the distance, far back among the mountains, a thunder storm was raging. Limpy could see the brilliant, jagged flashes of lightning pierce the inky blackness, like spatterings of molten gold. Intermittently, miles away, resembling a gigantic, varicolored spotlight, trembling sheets of blue and azure flame would light the vastness of the hills. Subdued rumblings of thunder, like the growled mutterings of a sleeping lion, were barely perceptible to the ear.

"Some bad storm back in the mountains," Limpy thought idly.

Just before dawn, the mares became uneasy. With shrill neighs they called their colts to their sides and trotted about, heads restlessly upheld, whiffling and blowing scarily. Limpy, sitting on his horse watching the dim forms which had now banded together, timid, alert, impatient, prey to some instinctive fear, heard a swishing, an eery rushing, which gradually broadened into a sullen roar.

Surging down the dry bed of the river, the result of a cloudburst in the mountains above, rushed an imposing wall of turgid water. Its foam-topped crest seemed lit by a phosphorescent radiance as it swept on with sullen, devastating savageness. In the East, filtered streaks of ruddy light forewarned of the coming day.

The horses, terrified beyond measure at the appalling, foamy flood, sought the highest spot at the island's end. Limpy kept just in advance of the rapidly rising water and watched them with a vague feeling of uneasiness.

Then, across the intervening torrent, coming from the opposite bank, entreating, pleading, commanding, uprose the high, insistent call of a stallion to his mares. Fleeing into the security of the foothills when the mares and colts had been gathered, he had come to seek his own under the cover of darkness.

At the clarion whistle, the bunch of horses disintegrated. The mares drew apart by themselves and answered the call of their lord and master with gentle whickers of recognition. Once more the vibrant, trumpetlike tones of the

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stallion pierced the morning air. In untamed abandon the mares, with a wild, stampeding rush answering the primal call of mate to mate, broke for the shelving beach.

And Limpy had a seemingly impossible task cut out for him. Charging back and forth, circling, heading, flanking, at times driving his horse body-deep in the torrent to turn the insane bunch, Limpy fought them back inch by inch. He fully realized that, once in the grip of that débris-filled current, few, if any, would survive to clamber up the opposite bank.

At last, just as day broke, baffled at every turn, the mares gave over their mad attempt to join the stallion and headed back toward the riding bunch.

Thundering along in the rear, close by the yellow water's edge, Limpy, with voice and whip, urged them on. It was then that his well-nigh exhausted horse, stepping on a round piece of drift, stumbled and fell, his neck twisting under him with a sharp crack. Sensing what was coming, Limpy attempted to fling himself from the saddle, but one foot hung in a stirrup. The falling horse pinned him down. Came an excruciating pain in his leg and then utter blackness.

The first trumpeting call of the stallion had aroused the foreman. Instantly, he surmised that the mares would attempt to rejoin their leader, so he aroused the crew to drive the stallion away. And, all unknown to Limpy, through the pearl-gray of the coming dawn the punchers had watched the tail end of his fight with the frenzied mares.

"He's got 'em headed now!" Tom Miller exclaimed with a sudden sigh of unrestrained relief. "That kid's saved a couple of thousand dollars' worth of horseflesh for the Seven H, and he did it by pure, unadulterated grit."

Barely had he concluded the observation before a little concerted groan of dismay burst from the coterie of watchers as Limpy's horse stumbled and fell. They waited in strained immobility for him to get to his feet. But both horse and rider lay quiet and inert. One of the crew, in a sudden flash of inspiration, clambered monkeylike to the top of the canvas-covered chuck wagon.

"The horse lays in the edge of the water with a broken neck, and Limpy's pinned under him. Six inches more, and it'll cover the kid, too."

The foreman breathed hard with a realization that cut and hurt as he scanned the river. A raging, swirling, eddying, muddy flood, filled from bank to bank with drift; it was rising slowly, fed by the cataract of water which poured down from the mountains.

Tom Miller wasted no superfluous words, performed not one unnecessary act. With a set, determined face he raced for the nearest stake horse. Discarding his boots and coat, he mounted bareback and galloped up the river. The foreman had resolved to attempt the well-nigh impossible feat of swimming the stream. And he was taking his life in his hands in making the attempt. The raging torrent, confined within the high banks, pulled and tugged with the power of a thousand horses, racing onward with the speed of an express train. Filled with débris, logs, branches, trees, all the dead and uprooted accumulation from the mountains, it was a boiling caldron of eddies and vortexes. There was a remote possibility, a bare chance that the foreman might reach the island before the water had covered Limpy's unconscious form.

He figured on entering the stream half a mile above the island, taking advantage of cross eddies and, assisted by his swimming horse, land on the upper end of the island. And this risk he was going to take in spite of the fact that, providing he missed the island, his life was forfeit. Behind the galloping foreman, lumbering along heavily, tears

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streaking his puffy cheeks, the cook hastened.

Going a hundred yards back from the bank, the foreman turned his horse and, whipping him into a dead run, plunged into the swirling torrent. Then commenced a racking fight.

Heading diagonally toward the island, taking advantage of every favorable current, he guided the swimming animal. Buffeted by floating logs, scratched and swept by half-submerged branches, fighting their way through the massed débris, the pair gradually won toward the center of the river.

The horse was palpably tiring. His swimming grew more labored. Toward them raced an immense log, propelled forward by the thrust of the swift current. Urging his horse to renewed exertions, Tom Miller attempted to evade its menacing bulk. But the horse was unequal to the task. With the impact of a battering-ram, the log struck the animal midway of the body, and both horse and rider disappeared beneath the yellow flood.

When the foreman fought his way to the surface, he could see the island before him. It was as though he were stationary in mid-stream, with the land rushing toward him at lightning speed. Steadying himself, one hand on a floating chunk, he paid no need to the drift which whipped and tore at his bruised body. As he was swept around the head of the island, he grasped in a viselike grip some overhanging branches. With a superhuman effort he drew himself to land.

For a moment he lay inert, exhausted by his strenuous exertions; then, scrambling to his feet, he set out at a run for the lower end of the island.

Halfway there, where the flood ran nearly level with the bank, the foreman was joined by the cook, who scrambled out of the water puffing and blowing like a grampus. That quixotic worthy, spurred into the rash undertaking by his whole-hearted affection for the little cripple, despite the protestations of the crew, had plunged into the river a little behind the foreman. Like a fat, ungainly porpoise or a seal, he had ridden the top of the torrent, his bulky body floating high on the surface. Freed from the pulling undertow which handicapped the other, buoyed up by a log he had clutched, the cook had half swum, half paddled, across in a more direct line.

Side by side the soggy pair raced for the fallen horse and rider. And they were not an instant too soon. The water had risen until it all but covered the inanimate body of the lad. Only his face was completely exposed, and that lay upturned in marblelike whiteness against the yellow flood.

Working in extreme haste, the pair raised the dead body of the horse and freed Limpy's foot from the stirrup in which it was entangled. Then gently they bore him to the upper end of the island.

As they laid him down, Limpy regained consciousness. He slowly opened his eyes and gazed at the rescuers. In puzzled surprise he noted their dripping clothes and their scratched and battered faces. Then the realization of the nearness of his escape was borne upon him. A little, thankful smile lit his face.

"Much obliged for savin' the night wrangler," he said in a weak voice.

The foreman concealed his real feelings under a brusque, explosive outburst. "Night wrangler, the devil! We wouldn't 'a' come across that for no ornery night wrangler. We come to get one of the top hands of the outfit."

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Hill-bred Barton's Code

By Charles Wesley Sanders

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

AFTER serving a year in prison, Billy Barton returns to the town in which he had been arrested for robbing the safe of the Presley Warehouse. Barton was innocent, and he came to settle his score with a fellow employee, Warwick, who had falsely testified against him. Viola Merritt had also lied in her testimony, but Viola was a woman, and Hill-bred Barton never settles scores with women.

Bob Procter, a mountain man and a banker, is the young man's only friend. While waiting for the bus which plies between the town and the village of Laurel in the hills, Barton overhears a quarrel between Viola Merritt and Warwick. During Barton's imprisonment the two have been married. Ruth Dempster, daughter of a mountain doctor, a young woman whom Barton has never seen before, joins him on the bus and tells him she knows all about his false conviction. She induces him to go to Laurel. Here, she promises, he can get hold of the real men who were concerned in his false imprisonment.

There is an accident to the bus, and they encounter a big giant of a man, Jim Edwards, a whisky runner for Merritt, Viola's father, who is foreman of the mill at Laurel. Ruth explains to Barton how Edwards, who was formerly married to Viola, has been annoying her. Barton feels himself drawn to Ruth and decides to get a job at the mill in Laurel.

Merritt hires Barton and invites him to his house until the young stranger can find a boarding house. At the Merritt home Barton discovers Edwards and Viola. When Barton refuses to drink the raw whisky which his host provides, Merritt is about to challenge his guest. Just then Warwick walks into the room. The stage is well set: Barton is surrounded by all his enemies, Viola, her father, Jim Edwards, and Warwick.

CHAPTER VIII.

BAREHANDED.

THE eyes of Warwick traveled first to Merritt, and Merritt looked at him scornfully.

"Come in," Merritt said. "I reckon you know all these people here."

Warwick's gaze went to his wife and then passed from her to Barton. His scrutiny of his wife had been rather appealing, as if he asked for the protection from Merritt which he knew she might afford. But when at last his eyes rested on Barton, swift terror leaped into them. His smooth face blanched. Ordinarily he had a good color, but its flight now brought out an ugliness which Barton had not noticed in him before. Lack of chin, prominence of thin nose, protrusion of ears, shadows beneath his eyes—all these defects leaped out, while his blood rushed back against his heart. Then his hands went groping on either side of him for support. Viola, seeming to fear that he was about to fall, sped across the room to him and put her arms about him.

"Never mind," she said. "He won't hurt you."

Barton looked at Merritt, and Merritt looked at Barton. The latter had

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expected to see that hard amusement return to Merritt's face, but the keen eyes filled with wonder.

"Is hit you he's afraid of?" Merritt asked. "Can one man make another afraid like *that?* I didn't believe hit."

Barton only shrugged his shoulders. Merritt poured out a big drink of whisky and handed it to Viola.

"Give him that dram," he said. "Get him out of his faint—or whatever hit is. Hit's bad to see a man act like that."

Viola handed the whisky to her husband. Warwick drank half of it and choked on the rest of the fiery dose.

"He cain't even take a dram without sputterin'," Merritt said.

The couple of swallows, however, seemed somewhat to revive Warwick. He stared at Barton.

"What's he doing here?" he asked. "Is that what you phoned me for, Merritt—to come down here to meet this man?"

"What a fool you are," said Merritt. "He come down here on his own account." He smiled a devil's smile. "He rode down here in the bus with Ruth Dempster. He stayed last night at Dempster's house."

A weak little fire blazed up in Warwick's eyes, but it died down again as quickly as it had come.

"You better look out, Barton," Merritt said. "He'll put a bullet in yo' some time. Like everybody else he's in love with Ruth Dempster."

"We'll just leave Miss Dempster's name out of it," Barton said icily.

Edwards got to his feet swiftly. "And you——" he began.

A gun flashed into Merritt's right hand and was raised to a level with Edwards' heart.

"Yo' shet yore mouth," Merritt said, and he cursed Edwards despite the presence of his daughter. "We have other business to settle here, an' we're goin' to settle hit now."

"Not with Mr. Barton here, father," Viola pleaded.

"Hang Barton!" said Merritt. "This matter will be settled now. I got a gun on Edwards, an' thar hit stays till I know what's what. Edwards, you wrote to Viola tellin' her she *had* to come down here. What do you mean by sayin' she *had* to come down here—*my* daughter? Let's have the truth now, or I'll blow yore heart into little pieces. Yo' been playin' strange tricks lately. Thought I didn't know, eh?"

"I didn't say Viola *had* to come," Edwards replied.

"You're lying," Viola cried. "You did say I had to. I came because I thought you, father——" She paused as if she feared she might say too much.

"I know just what's goin' on," Merritt said. "Yo' cain't fool me, Edwards. Now listen: From this on you an' me does business, but no more. You-all leave my daughter alone. If you speak to her, or if you write a line to her, I will wipe you out like I would any rattlesnake or copperhead. Take out yore gun an' empty hit."

Edwards obeyed. Barton observed that Merritt was so sure of his own marksmanship that he did not fear to face Edwards while Edwards had a gun in his hands. When Edwards had put his useless gun away, Merritt returned his to his holster. Then Merritt poured himself another drink of whisky—a drink which brimmed the big glass. Without spilling a drop he put the glass to his lips and slowly drank the nauseating liquor. He set down the glass and turned to his daughter.

"This, o' course, bein' as you wish it to be," he half stated and half questioned.

Viola nodded. Her father looked at Warwick briefly.

"Gawd only knows why," he said. "I would sooner see you Edwards' wife. But it shall be as you wish it to be. You can go, Edwards, but remember that if

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you-all plays any tricks, we will shoot hit out on sight. Yo' can have a drink ef yo' want hit."

Edwards took the same-sized drink Merritt had taken and with as steady a hand. "Don't I git one word?" he asked sullenly.

"Oh, yo' can speak yore piece, I reckon, but don't make hit a long one," Merritt answered. "I've had my touch of liquor, an' I'm ready to eat."

"Viola was mine before she was this ——" He tried to think of a word sufficiently descriptive, failed, and shook his head. "She was mine," he went on. "She divorced me. Ain't I got a right to fight to git her back? Wouldn't you fight, Merritt?"

"Hit ain't that," Merritt said. "Hit's what she wants."

Edwards took another big drink. Then he turned swiftly on Barton.

"You-all are carryin' a gun," he said.

"I haven't denied it," Barton said.

"Everybody's got a gun on him but me," Edwards lamented.

Barton felt himself grow suddenly warm. He sensed somehow that one of those moments which would be balm for his outraged spirit had arrived. He knew that Edwards was referring to an inequality in their fighting equipment. Barton snapped his gun from the holster with a movement which made Merritt stare, hard as it was to surprise him. Barton handed the gun to Merritt.

"You are my host," he said in a low voice. "I am trusting my pistol to you."

"Hit is a good one," Merritt said, "and you draw hit well."

"See that you give it back to me," Barton said sharply. "Now, what is it, Edwards?"

"Ef I cain't git one girl I'll git another," Edwards said. "Ef I cain't git Viola I'll git——"

"Shet yore mouth."

That command did not come from Merritt; it came from Barton, a hill-bred man now in every fiber of his being.

Barton was on the balls of his feet. He teetered a little, while his body froze, and his brain flamed. Edwards, fascinated, stood looking at him. There was no sound in the room save the sound of Viola's quickened breathing. Barton was happy. Fight, Ruth, had said, and now the fight—the first fight—was imminent. Long afterward Barton remembered looking into Viola's eyes and seeing a flame of admiration there.

"You and I will go up the road together, Edwards," Barton said. "You know, we had a previous rendezvous. This may be a 'rendezvous with death' for one of us. There is a woman here, and this is pretty furniture—much too pretty to be broken. Come!"

"You-all kin talk, cain't you?" Edwards sneered.

"Hit mought be that he kin fight like he kin talk," said Merritt. "In that case"—he shrugged his big shoulders—"I'd like to go along, but I hain't interferin' with the quarrel of no other men."

"Stay where you are," Barton commanded. "And remember, when I come back I shall expect my gun. You are my host, if you know what that means."

"I reckon I kin gather what you-all are drivin' at," Merritt said.

Barton moved toward the door. Edwards followed him. They passed out into the moonlit night. Barton led the way out of Merritt's yard. Edwards crunched heavily behind him, his feet spunning the rocks which overlay the road. Barton's back was to Edwards, but his ears were attuned to each move that Edwards made. He rather expected Edwards to attempt to spring upon his back or to strike him from behind, but he underrated the confidence which Edwards had in his own ability as a fighter of men. No one had ever cowed Edwards except Merritt.

Presently they came to an open field from which hay had recently been cut.

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There was no fence between the road and the field. Barton led the way into the field. There he faced Edwards.

"An excellent place, don't you think?" Barton asked.

"I hain't thinkin'," Edwards sneered.

"Shall we remove our coats?" Barton asked with excessive politeness because he knew that maddened Edwards.

Edwards tore off his coat with such violence that there was the sound of ripping cloth. Barton was out of his so quickly that both garments struck the ground at the same instant. Barton stood erect, waiting to see what pose Edwards would assume. Edwards crouched. He did not knot his hands. He only curled the fingers. Both elbows were at his hips, the forearms thrust forward from there.

"That's rather a ridiculous pose, Edwards," Barton said. "Why don't you come up and guard yourself. I'm going to hit you in a minute."

Edwards, partly because of the white mule he had drunk, had an instant of sheer insanity. He tried to throw himself on his taunting antagonist. Barton met him with a smashing blow on the mouth. Crimson spurted from a cut lip. The sight of it made Barton like granite. His muscles, his nerves, were gathered tight; he was ready to repel another attack, or launch one of his own. He was perfectly cool. His brain was very still, but keenly alert. He was thinking of the time this man had tried to place his hairy, dirty hands on Ruth Dempster. Previously he had felt anger about that, but he felt no anger now because this was the hour of his satisfaction and Ruth's.

A roar came from Edwards. He backed away and put up a defense that would have been ludicrous to a trained boxer, but Barton was not a trained boxer. He had always fought as hill men fight, struggling body mostly against struggling body. His remark about Edwards' pose had been no more than a taunt. He knew they would come to grips. That was what he wanted. He wanted to tear Edwards' heavy muscles and perhaps to snap a bone. There was more in that for a hill man than the mere impact of a driven fist.

'Whyn't you fight man fashion?" Edwards demanded when the roar had flattened itself against the wayside hills.

"Come right in," Barton invited.

But Edwards did not come right in. He executed a half circle and came back on it. He had heard how strange Barton's speech was. He knew Barton had been to college. It might be that Barton had learned odd tricks of fighting there. Edwards had no more idea than a rattlesnake in the sun what men did or learned at college. He had never been more than thirty miles from Laurel.

Edwards executed that half circle and return again. Barton grew tired of the awkward movement. He grew tired of waiting. Suddenly, with motions as incredibly swift as those of a chimney sweep darting home to her sooty young, Barton flung himself on Edwards.

"Ah," Edwards gloated.

For a moment they were locked in each other's arms. Edwards' whisky-laden breath was in Barton's face. Barton had always disliked the odor of corn whisky, and, coming as this odor came, it doubly sickened him. With all the strength of a body which had been kept clean, he attempted to sweep Edwards off his feet and to dash him to the ground. But Edwards, despite constant indulgence in whisky, had used his muscles since boyhood, and it was not to be expected that the strength would flow out of them in a struggle still so young. Barton failed. Suddenly he swept his arms away from Edwards and seized one of Edwards' hands in both his own. In spite of his bulk Edwards was quick, and he snatched the hand free before Barton's clutch could fasten to hold. They were still close to each other, and

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Edwards tried to send a suddenly lifted knee viciously into the pit of Barton's stomach. But the trick was too old. Barton's hard abdominal muscles drew back and ridged themselves, and the knee came weakly against what might have been a stone wall.

Edwards' futile attempt left him off his balance. His face was close to Barton. Barton uppercut him to the jaw, and Edwards fell against him, grappling. Barton tried again to lift him from his feet. There was an instant during which Edwards struggled desperately to save himself, but now the whisky had died out of him. His breath came laboredly. The blow on the jaw had had its effect, too. Barton felt the transporter come to his tiptoes, but Barton's grip was a little high. He suddenly released Edwards, and Edwards dropped back. Then Barton took him about the hips. Edwards came up slowly at first. Once more he was on tiptoe. Then his feet were off the ground. He kicked wildly at Barton's shins. Barton lifted him along his body. Edwards knew what was coming. With a wild oath he snapped at Barton's face with his teeth.

Barton gave him the benefit of one round oath. Edwards had ceased to be a man worthy of anybody's steel. A worthy foeman did not use his teeth. He fought grimly, fairly till the fight was done.

When Edwards' head was six inches above Barton's, Barton stooped with another movement as swift as light and flung Edwards over his left shoulder. Edwards, going, tried to throw a detaining arm about Barton's neck to drag Barton with him.

But there was too much strength, too much youth, too much clean living behind the cast of that body. Edwards went straight over. As Barton turned he saw Edwards sprawl along the hard clay. Barton plunged and landed on Edwards' back. He turned Edwards over, put his left knee on Edwards' right wrist, pinioning it to the ground, seized Edwards' left hand with his right, and, with his left forearm pressed on Edwards' throat, began to push the other's head back.

As the head went back slowly, but surely, Barton bent the wrist which his right hand clutched. The movement would have broken the bone of an ordinary man, but Edwards was not an ordinary man. The bones in his wrist were as big as those in the forearm of a strong man.

However Barton's effort cost Edwards excruciating pain. Also Barton was shutting off his wind. Edwards' head was so far back now that the cords of the throat were stretched, and the chin was thrust into the air. Edwards' eyes were half closed, and Barton above him could see that only the whites were showing. There was then a sudden tremor all through Edwards' body, and he collapsed beneath Barton's hands.

Barton moved to one side and waited. Life came slowly back to the transporter. He straightened his body and opened his eyes. For a space he lay blinking at the stars. Then he turned his head and saw Barton.

"Got enough?" Barton asked.

Edwards lay still for a moment, eying his antagonist. Barton knew that he was only waiting for a return of his strength. The fight had not all been taken out of him yet.

One thing Barton had to consider now —he had to weigh the impression this fight would make on Merritt. So far Merritt was an aloof, little-understood player in the drama, but Barton knew that he could not tell what he might finally have to do with Merritt. Merritt had proved that he would give his daughter whatever she asked. If she asked Merritt to protect Warwick from Barton, when Barton came at last to make the little man tell the truth, Merritt would fight. Barton could not let

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Merritt think it had taken him too long to dispose of Edwards.

Therefore Barton sprang and pinioned Edwards' hands with his knees. The fingers of his left hand sank into Edwards' throat. His right fist was lifted above Edwards' face menacingly.

"Beg Miss Dempster's pardon just as if she were here," he ordered.

Edwards weakly shook his head. Barton got to his feet then. For an instant his feet were close to Edwards' armpits. Edwards might have tripped him, but Edwards in that instant was too slow.

Barton took him by the shoulders and dragged him erect. He stepped back and found that Edwards could stand. Not only could Edwards stand, but desperation gave him strength, and he sprang toward Barton.

Three minutes later Barton, having swiftly brushed the dust from his clothing, opened the screen door of Merritt's home and stepped inside. The three who had waited were sitting in the living room.

Barton confronted Merritt.

"I'd like my gun back, please, sir," he said with the formal politeness of the country.

Merritt handed the gun to him. "Where's Edwards?" he asked.

"Lying out in the road, unconscious," Barton answered. "Perhaps you had better go and see if he is badly hurt. I hit him rather harder than I intended that last time."

He was not bragging. He was after an effect, and he could see by the look in Merritt's eyes that he was getting it. Few things could stir Merritt to admiration. The poise after battle which this man was showing was one of them. This man's readiness to battle, was another. The steadiness of the hand which, with swift grace, returned the pistol to the holster, was a third.

"Let him lie," said Merritt brutally. "I ain't no nurse."

"He may be dead, father," Viola said. "Or he may die in the night."

"I'll have me another drink, and then we'll eat our supper," Merritt said coldly. "Ef Edwards dies in the night somebody will come on him in the morning."

CHAPTER IX.

A SHADE TOO SLOW.

I AM sorry that I cannot partake of your hospitality, Merritt," Barton snapped.

"Why not?" Merritt snapped back.

"We won't mention your daughter," Barton said.

"I reckon not," Merritt stated significantly.

Barton stepped back a pace. His eyes were on Merritt's hands.

"I refrain, but not for the reason you think," Barton said quietly. For obvious reasons I can't sit at table with this fellow Warwick."

"Fer which I don't blame you," Merritt said.

"He bore false witness against me," Barton said. "He lied like a man that has stolen a mule in the night. He's a poor, weak thing, but I have to deal with him. I'll bid you good night."

He was at the door in two steps—two backward steps that permitted him to keep his eyes on Merritt's hands.

Merritt's hands were at his sides, but Barton saw the fingers twitch just perceptibly. Nothing but the feel of a pistol butt would still that twitching. Barton had seen it before. He had seen belching death follow it, too.

"Mr. Barton, don't go," Viola Warwick pleaded. "Let us not be enemies."

"Madam," said Barton, "I can say no more. I am leaving."

"Do you think I lied about you, too?" Viola asked.

"I can't discuss this further, please," Barton said, and he stepped just outside the door, though he still faced Merritt.

"Stop!"

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Merritt bellowed the word, and his face was livid. The twitching of his fingers increased.

"Hit's a fair question the girl asks, and you-all will answer hit," he cried. "Did she lie, or didn't she lie? *Did* my girl lie?"

Barton was silent. He knew that this was so far the biggest moment he had ever lived. He had disposed of Edwards. He had known he could dispose of Edwards. But Merritt was different. Merritt would kill, or be killed. But like all big moments this only brought out the rocklike quality which was the predominating one in Barton's make-up. He was so exceedingly still, as he stood there in the doorway, and the light that Merritt knew was a flame of death, burned so hotly in his eyes, that the twitching in the older giant's fingers ceased.

"Yo' got any answer?" Merritt insisted.

Barton remained silent. Then Merritt' right hand shot toward his holster. The movement was fast, amazingly fast for a man of his years, but it was not fast enough. When Barton had replaced his loaded pistol in his holster, he had made sure that it reposed there loosely and freely. And he had had a signal. He had seen, in the very fraction of a second, the light in Merritt's eyes change from one of anger to one of resolution. Therefore Merritt's hand was still inside his coat on its outward journey when Barton's gun covered Merritt's heart.

"Drop it back in the holster, Merritt," Barton said. "I'll kill you if you don't. It'll mean the electric chair for me, with these two people to swear against me, but I'd rather dies in the chair than take one of your bullets."

A greenish hue, spotted with red, covered Merritt's face. But he knew from experience when a man will shoot, and when he will not. He dropped the pistol back in its holster.

"Take your hand out slowly," Barton ordered.

Merritt slowly withdrew his hand till Barton saw that it was empty.

"Both hands above your head now," Barton required.

"No by——" Merritt began.

"I'll kill you if you don't," Barton said, and his tone was as cold as death and as clear as a June sky above a mountain peak. He meant what he said. He was not going to let Merritt shoot him down. Merritt had killed two men and gone free. With Warwick and Viola for witnesses he would doubtless not even have to go to the county jail to make bond. Barton was determined not to be Merritt's third victim.

Merritt's hands went slowly above his head.

"Now, Warwick, go and take his guns away from him," Barton ordered.

"If Warwick so much as lays a finger on me, I'll draw a gun if I drop doin' hit," Merritt declared.

"Father," Viola interposed, "either you or Mr. Barton is going to be killed here in a moment unless you give up your guns. Will you let me take them father, please. I—I can't stand it. Where would I be if you were killed?"

Even the purple and the red spots faded from Merritt's face, leaving it as it would be when he lay dead.

"Very well, Viola," said Merritt.

"Step up behind him, Mrs. Warwick," Barton requested. "When you get the guns, hold their butts out and bring them to me, please. I'm sorry to have you participate in this, but your father will not have it otherwise."

He did not know that it was the gentleness in his tone that made the girl walk uncertainly as she approached her father. He merely thought she was sharing Merritt's humiliation. She obeyed him to the letter, and he put Merritt's guns into his coat pockets.

"You can put your hands down, Merritt," he said. "I'm leaving now. I fully

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realize what this means. If you try to kill me by a chance shot in the dark, I'll have to come back and kill you. I suppose you have another gun in the house."

Leaping backward he bolted through the screen door, and the night took him. He was sure that none of the trio back in the house knew where he and Edwards had fought, and, as the field offered as much security as any other place he ran toward it. He might as well in his flight ascertain whether Edwards was lying in the field, still unconscious. It did not occur to him that he was courting further danger. Edwards might be lying in wait for him. He held Edwards in contempt now, as a man hardly to be reckoned with. This was partly due to his feeling that in Merritt he had made an implacable enemy. Merritt would fight again at the first opportunity.

There was no sign of Edwards anywhere. He had apparently recovered and taken himself off. Barton sped across the field and came out on a pike within a block of the village of Laurel. Some of the stores were still open, and he paused in the security of the lights of one of them to think over his situation.

"I may as well go to the hotel for the night," he said. "It would be the safest place."

He obtained a room and asked the woman behind the desk for the key.

"Ef thar's a key, hit's in the door," she told him carelessly.

Barton discovered that there was no key in the door, only a flimsy latch in an equally flimsy lock.

"Well, I have plenty of artillery," he said to himself.

Hiding Merritt's two guns in the bedclothes, he washed his hands and face and then went downstairs again.

"Can I get something to eat?" he asked.

"Supper is over long ago," the uninterested landlady said. "Dinin' room is dark. Thar's a restaurant down the street. I reckon the cussed place never closes—dirty, bootleggin' joint."

Inasmuch as Barton could have eaten sole leather, he went to the restaurant. He was inside the door before he saw that Edwards was seated at the last of the tables in the room. No one else was there except a girl behind the counter.

Edwards looked up. Barton stopped and regarded him expectantly. Edwards' face went from white to red several times and then remained the vivid hue, but he did not move. Barton saw that his face was bruised and swollen where Barton had struck him. He also saw that Edwards appeared to have been drinking considerably since the fight. Once in a while the hand upon which his head rested slipped, and the head fell forward. Barton thought it strange he should be so drunk as that and yet so instantly had recognized his foe.

"Anyway he's too drunk to fight any more to-night," Barton decided.

Nevertheless he took the seat nearest the door. This placed his back to the door, but he could not face that and Edwards, too, and just now he had to face Edwards. It was impossible to tell what a man filled with white mule would do. The girl came from behind the counter and took Barton's generous order. His purse was pretty flat, but he had had a day which had broken down a good many cells, and he felt the need of their renewal.

The girl took the order to the kitchen. While she was gone, Edwards rose to uncertain feet and walked toward the front door. Barton watched him steadily. His drunkenness might easily be feigned. He might attempt a sudden gun play.

Barton openly put his hand on the butt of his pistol beneath his coat. He wanted Edwards to see the action, but Edwards paid no attention to him. He went on into the street. Barton ate his

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supper and also went outside. For a while he stood in front of the restaurant, pondering what he was to do. He believed, though Edwards had been too far gone to confess it, that the transporter would leave Ruth alone in future. What a fellow like that needed was a good beating, and Edwards had certainly got the beating. Moreover Edwards would hear about the gun play in Merritt's house. He would question the weakling, Warwick, as to what had happened, and Warwick would tell him. Edwards would be doubly impressed by a man who could beat Merritt in that sort of game.

So he had taken care of Ruth in return for her kindness to himself. He must get about his own business. He recognized that instead of Warwick he had Merritt to deal with. Merritt despised Warwick, but he would protect Viola's husband. He would have to get Warwick alone the next night and get the truth out of him. He would have to have another job before long. He had no time to waste. Well, he'd be about his own affairs to-morrow.

As he walked back to the hotel he tried not to think of Ruth Dempster, but she persisted in keeping within the vision of his mind's eye. Curious girl, she was, very curious. She'd flash out at a man on occasion and then she'd be——

But he closed the mental shutter. He would not permit himself to behold Ruth Dempster as she might be to a man she cared for. All that was settled. Of course it was settled. He was just out of prison. His life was in danger. He had no money, no job. He might fail to wring from Warwick the confession he must have to clear his name. He might——

"You-all have a fine fighting spirit," he told himself in this reaction. "You start right in to mop up, and then you go squeamish because a girl has a pair of fine eyes, or pretty hair, or something. Shet your mouth."

He "shet" his mouth actually, so that when he reached the hotel it was in a grim, straight line, and he swept the lobby, where two or three mournful traveling men lounged, with eyes that held scorn and bitterness.

"You-all had a telephone call a while ago," the woman called to him from behind the desk. "Hyar's the numbeh."

She held out a slip of paper to him. He looked at the number on it, but of course the scrawled figures meant nothing. He stepped to the telephone and called the number. A strange voice answered.

Barton announced himself.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Barton," the man's voice said. "My name is Atchley. Can you step round to my house for a moment?"

Barton's eyes narrowed. What did Merritt or Edwards think he was—a fool who would step round to a stranger's house?

"I'm just going to bed," he said.

"Wait a minute."

Then came a golden voice over the telephone—Ruth Dempster's voice.

"Can't you step round to Mr. Atchley's house for a moment?" she asked. "It's the third house from the hotel on the side street."

"I'll be there right away," Barton said, and he could feel a strange, warm throbbing in his throat.

Atchley's way of asking a man to step round to his house was quite pat, Barton thought, as Atchley opened the door to him. Atchley was round himself. His body was like a barrel, and his head was like a little cask. His eyes were round. He pursed his lips so that his mouth was almost round, too. Barton had to smile—the first wholly human smile that had come to his lips in many months.

"Oh, I know," Atchley nodded. "Everybody smiles. Come in."

He waddled to a door ahead of Bar-

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ton. As Barton passed through the door he saw that Ruth and old Bob Proctor were in the room. Barton and Ruth looked at each other fleetingly, just nodding, but the glad look in the girl's eyes did not escape him. He was as glad to see her as she apparently was to see him, but it seemed difficult for either of them to express their feelings.

"Mr. Proctor," Barton said, "what in the world are you doing here?"

"I came in on the evening train," Proctor answered.

"But——"

"I telephoned him this morning after I left you," Ruth said.

"Bringing up reënforcements, are you?" Barton asked. "You shouldn't have bothered Mr. Proctor."

"I don't think I bothered him much," Ruth said. "I thought you might need some help."

"I've been getting along all right," Barton said and here again he was aware that some strange antagonism lay between them.

"You've had an encountier with Edwards, haven't you?" Ruth asked.

"How did you know that? Has he been talking? Has he dragged your name into it?"

Barton's tone was not so cold. There was a trickle of hot resentment in it. Ruth glowed for a moment under his look and then averted her eyes.

"I don't think he has said anything," she answered. "But Mr. Proctor and I saw him on the street after dark. He acted differently, and his face was bruised. He didn't speak to me."

"Does he usually?"

"When he's been drinking as he is to-night."

"I don't think he'll bother you any more," Barton said.

"Miss Dempster said you had gone to work for a man named Merritt at the mill, Billy," Proctor said. "That isn't going to leave you much time for yore other job, is hit?"

"I have to live," Barton said.

Proctor sighed a little.

"Well," he said, "sit down. I've got something to tell you. I'd have been down here before long even if Miss Dempster hadn't phoned me this mornin'. You needn't get mad at her for what she done."

"Mad at Miss Dempster?" Barton repeated. "Why, I couldn't do that. It would be rank ingratitude. She has been very kind to me."

"I reckon that was kind of a friendly glare you give her a moment ago then," Proctor said in his softest voice.

Barton, as he sat down, did not look at Ruth. If he had done so he would have found her smiling rather oddly at Bob Proctor.

"I've picked up a little news," Proctor said. "Hit's taken me a year to get around to hit. Hit's a wonder I didn't think of hit before. But then no man much younger thought of hit, so I reckon I'm not so much to blame. I been down interviewin' that watchman at the Presley plant, Billy."

"Oh, that old fool," Barton said scornfully. "I think he knows less than any man I ever saw."

"If he was a wise man I wouldn't have had to look him up," Proctor observed. "He would have come forward."

"That's right, Mr. Proctor," Barton said. "Pardon me. What did you learn from him?"

"Sometimes I have to have about so much go-before with Billy till I kin git him down to where I want him," Proctor told Ruth and Atchley. "He's so hard most times that hit's tol'able difficult to put a dent in him."

The barreled Atchley shook with laughter, and Ruth emitted a faint, feminine chuckle. Barton only sat and looked at Proctor. He didn't mind Atchley. Let Miss Dempster laugh if she wanted to.

"I learned a little bit of this an' a

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little bit of that," Proctor answered Barton's question. "The story really began, I think, the night before the robbery, an' none of that was brought out at the trial. We was all kind of flustered at that trial, me most of all, I reckon. I plumb lost my head with that attorney general.

"Well, I got hold of this watchman like I say, an' I sat down an' chatted with him and wasted a good cigar on him. That was last night. I told him to put on his skull cap and go over the ground back there a year ago an' see if there wasn't somethin' he could think of that he hadn't told the jury.

"Hit took him a long time, but finally he recollected that there had been two men at the warehouse the night before the robbery. It had always been his custom, he said, to lock the front door when he went his hourly rounds. The night before the robbery when he was startin' to go about at midnight he forgot the front door till he was on the second floor. He confessed to me that he had been dozin'—mebbe I prodded him right smart—before he started on them rounds, an' he just naturally got up and went into action without thinkin'. As soon as he recollected that the door was wide open he waddled back downstairs. Two men was a couple of feet inside the door, lookin' all around. The watchman wears rubber-heeled shoes, an' he had had sense enough to come soft. He put his gun on them two before they could stir.

"One of them said they had just stepped into the shelter of the door to get a light for their pipes. I told the watchman that that was a fool thing for him to believe. I said to him that that night an' the succeedin' night was the stillest, hottest nights we had last summer. He said he hadn't thought of that.

"As a precautionary measure he kept his gun on them whilst he handed over a match or two. One of the men took the matches and turned his back on the watchman and lit his pipe. He was shieldin' his own face; but the light from the match give the watchman a glimpse of the face of the other man. I reckon the feller with the match hadn't thought about his partner. Then the two of them went away."

"Would the watchman know that man again?" Barton asked.

"He says he thinks he would," Proctor answered. "That watchman come down from his roost in the hills many years ago, but one hill man can pick another. I reckon one hill man could pick another in Kingdom Come. The watchman says this was a hill man for certain. He says he never believed you was guilty of the robbery, and he would like to he'p you if he could."

"Will he be where we can get him when we want him?" Barton asked. "He's still working at the Presley warehouse regularly."

"He's on a vacation now," said Proctor dryly. "I phoned old Presley that he could furnish another watchman till this feller was brought back by me. I got him quartered over at the hotel. Hit appears that the pore ol' feller needs a rest. He hain't even got ambition enough to go to the dining room for his meals. Wants 'em served in his room. Tain't likely that anybody will see him in this here town of Laurel till he or me decides that he has rested enough."

CHAPTER X.

THE SECOND TIME.

"IT looks then as if I were wasting my time in Laurel," Barton said. "It would be a wild-goose chase to attempt to find two men whom I wouldn't recognize if I saw them."

"Yo' are forgettin' that there was a third man," Proctor said. "That was the man that knocked the watchman down the night of the robbery. At the trial the watchman described that man as a tall fellow wearin' a cap. One thing

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has penetrated the thick skull of that watchman, an' that is that the man that knocked him down wasn't either of the men that was inside the warehouse the night before. He is sure of that, an' when a man like him is sure of anything, you can about bank on it. His mind is a vague, whirlin' kind of a place, where few fac's sticks. When one does stick, yo' can be sure that it is a fac' sure enough.

"An' we ain't eliminatin' Warwick an' Viola by no manner of means. Viola's past lies back here. Warwick is her husband. They must have been mixed up more or less before they was married. Yo' ain't on no false trail when you follow Warwick, an' if you follow him far enough, I'm thinkin' he'll lead you to the two men who was in the warehouse that night, an' finally to the man that struck that blow an' then cracked the safe."

"And I shouldn't be surprised if that man proved to be Edwards," Ruth Dempster said.

"Why do you think that?" Barton asked eagerly.

"Edwards has done a good many things besides work in the mountain woods and transport whisky," Ruth answered. "For one thing, when business has been dull, he has worked in the quarry a mile from here on the Williams Ferry Pike."

"Where he learned to handle explosives," Barton guessed.

"Exactly."

"Why didn't you tell me this before?" Barton asked. "I might have wrung something out of Edwards to-night."

"You'll have to invent a new kind of wringer before you wring anything out of Edwards," Ruth said smartly. "He'd die before he'd tell anything to a man he hated. And you know whether he hates you or not. Besides, Mr. Barton, you must remember that you are another Declaration of Independence. It's hard to tell you anything."

Barton looked at her quickly. He had expected to find her angry, flushed of cheek, and bright of eye. But she was only smiling coolly. For a moment Barton regarded her gravely and then turned to Proctor.

"Your guess would be that Edwards blew the safe, and that Warwick and Mrs. Warwick lied for him," Barton said.

"And that these two hill men, probably for a few dollars, possibly for some other reason, went the first night to get the lay of the land," Proctor assented.

"If Warwick was in on the robbery, he could give Edwards the lay of the land better than any man in the world," Barton said dryly.

That left Ruth and Proctor rather blank.

"Miss Dempster and I don't claim to be much as detectives," Proctor said in an equally dry tone. "We're just foolin' around, tryin' to he'p you, Billy, just doin' the best we can."

"Oh, you both know I appreciate it," Barton said rather miserably.

"Don't you worry none about what we know about you, Billy," Proctor said. "The job is yours. We're just here to he'p. Ain't that true, Miss Dempster."

"That is true," said Miss Dempster without a blush, without the quiver of an eyelash.

A flush of youthful color dyed Barton's cheeks. He looked at the floor. Ruth sat gazing across at him, her lips now pressed firmly together.

"Leaving out Mrs. Warwick, there are four persons who were concerned in the robbery," Barton said. "There were four thousand dollars in the safe; that would be one thousand dollars apiece on an equal split. I suppose Edwards would risk his neck for a thousand."

"Edwards wouldn't split evenly with any one," Ruth said. "Besides,

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when he's transporting whisky he risks his life for far less than that. The sheriff here never interferes with him, but some day he will be faced by government men, and then there will be a battle in which some one will die. Four or five Federal men, with the posse men that are always ready to aid them, would be too strong for Edwards. He might kill some of them, but he'd never come out alive. Yes, he often risks his neck for his share in an automobile load of whisky."

Barton rose rather impatiently.

"I must be going if you'll excuse me," he said.

"You are welcome to remain here for the night, Mr. Barton," said Atchley. "Mrs. Atchley wasn't feeling very well, and she retired early. But we can take care of you."

"I've got to get out in the air," Barton said.

In this crowding in of facts, after his long groping in his mind for something tangible, he had to get out where there was space and air. He always thought best when he had the sky above him.

"It is best that he should go," Proctor, understanding old hill man, said. "But be careful, Billy. Don't let anybody sneak up on yo'."

"No sneaking up," said Barton.

He shook hands with Atchley and Proctor and bowed to Ruth. Then he turned toward the door. He heard a footfall behind him. He supposed it was Atchley coming as far as the door with him. He stepped aside to let his temporary host open the door. He found Ruth looking up at him.

"You will be careful, won't you?" she asked, and he saw that her lips were a little unsteady.

Barton was shaken all through his body. His mind for a moment was blank. Then he realized that Ruth's hand was in his. She had extended it with a friendly gesture. He held it loosely for a moment, and then his clasp on it tightened. For an instant she responded, and then he felt the tug of her attempted withdrawal. He let the hand go.

"I'll be careful," he said.

He opened the door and went out into the night. For a while he walked with head bent. He tried to fix his mind on his problem, but he could think of nothing but Ruth. Presently he found himself on a pike leading out of town. It sloped up a hillside. The hill's peak beckoned to him. Up there he could get himself together and think more clearly.

When he reached the top of the hill there were other hills beyond. He began an upward climb which by midnight brought him to an eminence from which he could look down upon a moonlight-flooded world. The coolness of the far-off mountains was his, and he felt his excitement die out of him. He sat down on a tree at the wayside and for a while let the cool silence drench him. Then he sat bolt upright and began to think.

It was one o'clock in the morning, with a definite plan in his mind, that he rose and started back toward the hotel. He felt immeasurably clearer of mind that he had felt since that day when the jury had brought in its unjust verdict. For the first time in a year he had communed with his beloved peaks, and he had come to be at one with them again. He had breathed of their keen, clean air; he had partaken of their strength again.

Now he was ready for a fight, but it would henceforth be a fight in which as Doctor Dempster had advised, he would use his head. He saw that he had been craftily dealt with. He had been the victim of a certain crude brain work on some one's part. It would do no good to go rushing madly about. He would have to use his brains.

When he reached the hotel he found to his dismay that the front door was

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locked. He went around the side of the old frame building and found it all in darkness. Returning to the front door he sought a bell, but found none. He rattled the loose knob, but there was no stir within.

"Damnation," he said. "I wish somebody would wake up. I'm as nearly tired out as I've ever been in my life."

Then he began to bang on the door with his knuckles. Having no baggage he had paid for his room in advance, and he was entitled to its shelter for such part of the night as remained.

It was five minutes before a light wavered down the stairs from above. The light was lifted and revealed an ancient negro in a red nightgown. The old man stood peering toward the door.

"Come on," Barton said. "I'm staying here for the night. Let me in."

The man hesitated a moment longer. Then he advanced to the door. Shielding his light with a shaking hand, he looked through the dirty glass.

"Whut room yo' occupyin'?" he demanded.

"Twenty-four," Barton answered.

"Oh, yo' is de gemm'en whut didn't come home," said the negro and pushed back the bolt in the door.

Barton stepped inside. The negro stepped back from him swiftly. The hand that held the light shook more violently.

"What's the matter?" Barton asked. "You looked scared."

"Dey hab been happenin's 'nuff to sca' anybuddy," the negro said. "De bank was blowed plumb open dis night, and Mr. Merritt he hab been shot."

Barton recoiled. His mind went, swift as thought can fly, back to the night he had gone out along the river, and the Presley safe had been blown open.

He stood staring at the negro. The negro stared back at him above the smoky lamp he held, the whites of his eyes showing, as he rolled the eyes about in receded sockets.

"Good Lord!" said Barton. "Again!"

"No, suh," the negro said. "Dis am de fust time."

"I wasn't thinking of that," Barton said.

"De sheriff an' a heap ob udder men hab been lookin' de town ob Laurel froo," the negro volunteered. "Dey hab eben been hyah, askin' de missus all manners ob questions."

"Here?" said Barton. "Whom were they looking for?"

"Jus' nobuddy—jus' somebuddy, Ah reckon. Dey didn't say."

"I'll go to my room," Barton said.

The negro stepped back, so that Barton might pass him, and then he followed Barton up the stairs. At the landing Barton paused. He looked back at the clock on the wall. Half past one! He looked at the negro. The latter was also eying the clock.

"Half pas' one," said he. "De bes' ob de night am gone. De roosters crow fo' mawnin' buffo long."

At the door of his room Barton struck a match and went inside. He lighted the lamp and closed the door. He could hear the ancient negro shuffling along the hall. Barton sank down on the edge of the bed. His mind was wholly confused. This situation, he felt, was an exact counterpart of the other. The particulars of it were the same. It could not be a coincidence.

"Damn those hills," Barton breathed. "They've betrayed me twice."

He sat there on the edge of the bed for he knew not how long. Then a sense of peril came to him. He searched in the bedclothes and found Merritt's two pistols. He glanced swiftly about the room for a hiding place. Above the washstand there was a heavy mirror which, its dust showed, had not been moved for many months. A heavy nail had been driven below it so that it might jutt out against the suspending

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wire. Barton carefully laid Merritt's pistols behind this mirror.

Then he sat down on the edge of the bed again and took out his own pistol. It was just as Proctor had given it to him. He had not fired it. Barton took out the cartridges. They had a little greenish look, all of them. The pistol was perfectly clean. Those slightly corroded bullets and the clean pistol would prove that the weapon had not been fired that night. But what flimsy proof against the proof that he had been out of the hotel till half past one in the morning! He heard a noise in the street, listened, did not hear it again.

But the noise stirred him to alertness. Nerves and muscles tightened. That old familiar coldness came to him again, and it was not melted by the fleeting recollection that he had frequently renewed his impulse to fight. Well, there had been a good many interruptions. There had been the interruption which Ruth had caused, but he did not regret that. It might give her a little basis for faith in him. She must know that he had neglected his own business to attend to hers. There had been the interruption which Merritt and Warwick and Viola had caused. Yet he had been here only a little more than thirty hours. Thirty hours, seeming so long in the retrospect, were a brief time. Besides he might not be suspected. The sheriff might have come to the hotel only as one of the places in which he had been seeking some one else.

However he had better begin to establish his alibi, poor as it would prove to be. He would go to Proctor and describe the place he had gone to. His ability to describe it ought to prove to any jury that he had really been there when he said he had. And yet if there were to be people to swear that he had been at Merritt's and at the bank——

What was that? A noise, definite and certain this time; the fall of heavy feet on the stair; and then a thin, high voice:

"Bahton, air you' in yo' room? Ef yo' air, come out. I'm the sheriff, an' I'm goin' to speak with you-all. I've got three deputies with me. We-all are ahmed."

Barton's pistol flashed out. He faced the door, his face passionless except for his blazing eyes. His body was rigid like rock. He said nothing.

"We-all know you air in theah," the sheriff said. "We been watchin' foah a long time, an' we saw yo' light come on some time ago."

Barton's pistol came up. Then he let his arm fall. There was no use in firing through the door. No sheriff would be fool enough to stand within the line of a shot like that. Besides he must not kill a sheriff, or one of his deputies. Whatever his case was now, it would be infinitely worse if he slew an officer of the law. That would be but a confession of guilt. He restored his pistol and went to the door and snapped back the flimsy catch. As he opened the door four guns covered him.

"Hands up, Bahton," said the same thin, high voice.

Barton glanced at the owner of the voice. He was a little man, this sheriff. As most little officers do, he carried an enormous gun, and another sagged from a belt at his thin hip. The deputies, however, were big, resolute-looking men.

"Up with yore hands, stranger," one said. "No foolin' about it, eitheh."

Such a flaming anger as Barton had never known swept through him. It was as if a blast from a suddenly opened furnace door had been entirely absorbed by his body. Confound all these officers. Was he to be constantly humiliated by them?

"To the devil with you," he replied. "I'll not put up my hands. I'm not going to draw a gun on any of you, but I'll be cussed if I'm going to stick up my hands every time an armed deputy comes along. I haven't done anything."

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"I'm comin' in an' take yore gun away from you'," the deputy announced.

He came in slowly, inch by inch. Suddenly, when he was near enough, he thrust his gun into Barton's stomach. That is a sickening sensation, but Barton was white hot and beyond sickening sensations. The deputy took the gun out of the holster and dropped it into his pocket. Then he swiftly ran his hand over Barton's pockets. He stepped back.

"All right, chief," he said. "He's plucked clean."

"What do you want me for?" Barton asked.

"Felonious assault with attempt to commit murder and attempted burglary," the sheriff replied.

"Well, what's the rest of it?" Barton snapped.

"Yo' air accused of shootin' Mr. Merritt in the shoulder, an' of blowin' the door off'n the safe in the bank."

"But I didn't kill *Mister* Merritt, and I didn't get any money at the bank?" Barton asked.

"Yo' plumb fell down on both of them jobs," the sheriff agreed. "Yore aim was bad, an' that safe was too strong for yo'. Come along."

Barton and the sheriff went down the steps together, the deputies herding after them.

"*Mister* Merritt," said Barton in the sheriff's ear. "I see where he gets by with his storing, and Edwards with his transporting."

The sheriff tried to look at the bright young eyes above his own and failed.

CHAPTER XI.

WITH A DIFFERENCE.

ON the way to the county jail Barton waited for the slightest chance to escape that he might have; but there was no chance. The four heavily armed men guarded him closely, keeping him in front of them so that they might shoot him down if he attempted to elude them. At the jail, while he was being searched, Barton characteristically turned to the big deputy for information, ignoring the little sheriff.

"Who accuses me?" he asked.

"You-all will have to ask the chief," the deputy answered carelessly.

"Why hit's Merritt," the sheriff said. "I'll phone him, and he can come down hyar. I hain't goin' to be mixed up in this thing 'less he is here to say you-all air the man." He went to the telephone and took down the receiver. "You-all kin set down," he said, with a glance over his shoulder at Barton.

"I'm able to stand," Barton said.

From the one-sided conversation Barton inferred that Merritt would come to the jail immediately; and he was there in his car within fifteen minutes. As he entered the room in which the five men stood, he ignored Barton and strode over to the sheriff.

"Where are my guns?" he demanded.

"I didn't find 'em, Mr. Merritt," the sheriff said. "He had but the one gun on him."

"Let's see hit," Merritt ordered, as if he and not the other were the sheriff.

"Pete has it," the sheriff said, indicating the big deputy.

"Let's have that gun, Pete," Merritt ordered again.

Pete drew out Barton's gun. Instead of handing it over to Merritt he held it lightly in his palm.

"I reckon not," he said.

Merritt took a threatening step toward him. Pete flashed the gun to a level with Merritt's heart. Pete's eyes gleamed wickedly.

"Stop where you-all are now, Merritt," he said. "Yo' cain't bully me, an' this would be a good time for you-all to learn hit. I'll just keep this gun. *I* ain't accusin' this young feller of puttin' a bullet into yore shoulder just on yore say-so. Mebbe this gun can speak for itse'f. Mebbe it'll tell us a little

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tale as to whether or not hit's been fired in the last little while or not. Yo' just tend to yore business, Merritt, an' I'll 'tend to mine, an' the gun, I reckon, where hit lies will 'tend to hits."

"Kennedy, didn't I tell you' yo' were a fool to pick this man as a deputy?" Merritt stormed, taken aback by opposition from a quarter he had not expected it from.

"An' I'll tell you suthin', Merritt," Pete said. "Kennedy didn't make me no deputy on the say-so of whisky runners an' storers. He made me a deputy on the say-so of the decent people in this town. They know things is rotten, an' they come out on my little farm, havin' heard I'd headed many a posse, an' they just natchelly made me be a deputy. I've no hankerin' for the job, but while I am a deputy I aim to be a good one."

"Yo' are Pete Lyle from over Green Gap way, ain't you'?" Merritt demanded.

"If I ain't I don't reckon thar is a Pete Lyle over that way," Pete answered imperturbably. "I stuck a gun in this boy's stummick to git him down here so we could talk this matter out."

"I'll talk to the sheriff," Merritt said.

"Whyn't you do hit then?" Pete asked:

"Sheriff, I make accusation against this man Barton for felonious assault," Merritt asserted. "He was in my house earlier in the evenin', havin' accepted my invitation to go there for supper, an' he drawed a gun on me an' threatened me. Then along about half past eleven he come back and shot me through the shoulder, while I was standin' on my front porch."

"What were you doin' on your front porch at that hour?" Barton asked. "I should have thought a hard-working man like you would have been in bed."

"I was takin' the air an' thinkin' about some things," Merritt stated.

"Just how did the shooting happen?" Barton asked.

"I've laid my information before the authorities of the county," Merritt cried. "Let them act."

"'Fraid to lug your story out in the open now," Pete suggested. "'Fraid you'll be able to improve it between now an' the time Barton has his trial."

"Yore a varmint with that gun in yore hand, ain't you?" Merritt sneered. "Well, I don't have to make up no story. I'll jus' tell the sheriff what happened."

Barton saw a gleam in Merritt's eyes. He perceived that Merritt had leaped at the chance to tell his story now. Then, when the trial came, he could call all these men to be witnesses to the fact that he had said what he had to say in the presence of the accused. Barton was not sure, but he believed that would be the legal aspect of the situation.

"I was standin' on my porch as I say," Merritt went on quickly. "This feller thinks I should have been in bed. You-all know, sheriff, that I don't require as much sleep as other men. Yo' have passed my house many a time an' seen me standin' on the porch, takin' the night air that way. Ain't that right?"

"Hit's c'rect," the sheriff assented.

"An' well you-all know hit, Kennedy," Pete Lyle sneered.

"See here, Lyle," Kennedy squeaked. "Don't go too far with me. Jus' remembeh you air my deputy."

"Yes, I'm rememberin'," Lyle declared.

"Well, I was standin' there," Merritt pursued, "when I saw a man cross the edge of the yard. When he got to the drive he turned and fired at me. The bullet went into my shoulder. My daughter called Doc Watson, an' he dressed the wound."

"It must have been a terrible wound," Barton said. "I don't see that it has crippled you."

"Hit was a flesh wound," Merritt said. "The doc put a pad an' some stickin' tape on hit after he washed hit."

"Merritt," said Barton icily, "do you

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mean to tell me that a flesh wound prevented you from pursuing and firing back at a man who had attacked you in the night. If that is true, all the tales I've heard about you have been false. Whatever else you have been said to be, everybody has given you credit for being a fighting man."

A gloating look came into Merritt's eyes.

"An' everybody has said that yo' had brains," he purred. "You-all perhaps don't recollect that yo' took the only two guns I had. Hit was necessary for me to run into the house an' upstairs an' get my shotgun. With the shotgun ready, I hunted all over my place an' up an' down the pike, but I couldn't find nobody. A man that shoots in the night that a way don't linger. Ain't that true, Barton?"

"I suppose that's true," Barton had to confess.

"An' ain't you-all the kind of man that would shoot in the dark?" Merritt demanded. "Didn't you put a gun on me right in my own house when I was trying to play host to yo'?"

"After I saw that your hand was about to wander to one of your guns," Barton said.

"He jus' beat you-all to hit, gettin' out yore gun," Lyle derided Merritt. "That's makes two men in Laurel that kin do hit."

"An' who's the other one?" Merritt challenged. "You?"

"Ef hit was me I would be too modest to say so," Lyle returned smoothly.

"Well, I want to make bond," Barton said. "May I call up some friends of mine?"

"Ruth Dempster probably," Merritt sneered. "See him hunt for a skirt to hide behind when he's in trouble."

Barton was a little distance from Merritt. Lyle was nearer. Lyle interposed himself between Barton and Merritt, as Barton sprang.

"Save that for some other time, Barton," Lyle said. "Git yore friend on the wire. Tut, tut, ain't I yore friend, too? Come now, don't make me fuss with you-all while I'm tryin' to keep Merritt covered. It is a difficult job."

Barton's mouth lifted at the corner. He had to give in to this likable fellow, and there was sense in what he said. But a little later he would collect from Merritt for that remark.

"Who do you-all want to call?" the sheriff asked. "I know about all the numbehs thar are."

"Mr. Atchley," Barton answered.

"What are you-all callin' that sneak for?" Merritt demanded.

"I'll collect for that, too, after a while, Merritt," Barton said. "Atchley is a friend of mine."

Merritt's eyes widened till blue irises and black pupils swam in the veined whites.

"The devil he is!" he exploded. "That reformer!"

"I don't know about his being a reformer," Barton said. "He seems to be a decent chap."

"That little bar'l," Merritt sneered. "He's the feller that's goin' to clean up Laurel. He's the feller that got Lyle onto this job—him an' a lot more mealy-mouths like him. A lot of good hit will do them. We'll show 'em who's runnin' Laurel before we get through with them. Laurel is goin' to be a town of men with red blood in their veins, or hit's goin' to be a town of men with milk an' water in theirs. Seems like yo' have tied up with the milk-an'-water folks, an' that after I had yo' up to my house, Barton."

"I came away from your house," Barton said.

"The numbeh is 463," Kennedy said.

Barton offered the number to the telephone girl who took her time about answering. In a moment, however, Barton heard a voice on the wire. Its owner proved to be Atchley.

Barton explained his predicament. "I

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reckon I'll have to appeal to my friend for aid," he said.

He did not want to draw Proctor too far into this. Proctor was growing old. His gun hand was not the gun hand of his youth, and his eyes were not the eyes of that earlier time, either.

"I reckon you will have to let me in on this, Mr. Barton," Atchley said. "Mr. Proctor could hardly make bond for you. He isn't known in Laurel, you know, and he has no property here. I'll be right down."

"Mr. Atchley will make bond for me," Barton reported to the sheriff. "He'll be right down."

Kennedy glanced furtively at Merritt. Merritt stood looking at the floor. This Barton had an amazing way of picking up friends. He had been in Laurel but a short time, and he had made friends with Lyle and with Atchley already. These, Merritt was well aware, were friends worth having, too. Merritt knew Atchley, had known him for many years, though they did not speak now when they met in the street. Merritt also knew Lyle as a quiet, modest man, owning a fine farm up the river. He had been puzzled and perturbed when Lyle had become one of Kennedy's deputies. Kennedy had explained that he had been waited on by a delegation headed by Atchley, and he had been unable to refuse their demand that Lyle be put on the sheriff's staff.

Merritt held men like Atchley in contempt, and he soon dismissed the matter from his mind. However it would apparently not remain dismissed. Barton's acquaintance with Atchley might be significent.

Barton had not left the telephone three minutes when an automobile stopped in front of the jail.

"Yore friends come prompt, Barton," Lyle smiled.

The figure of a slim, gray-haired man came into the doorway.

"Well, hit hain't neither," said Lyle in much surprise. "Dogged if hit ain't Squar' Reese.

Squire Reese, justice of the peace, stood looking at the men assembled in the room.

"Hawdy, gentlemen," he said politely.

The men responded to his greeting, with the exception of Merritt. Reese was another man whom Merritt despised. He was of the older school of mountain gentlemen. He had used a gun in his time, but he never carried one any more. The time had passed when gentlemen shot each other to death in pistol duels on the streets. Reese took a chair as befitted his station as a magistrate. Barton eyed him curiously. Barton was beginning to see that there was more in this situation than had at first appeared on the surface. Lyle most certainly must have an ace in the hole. He was not a man who bluffed. The elderly justice of the peace would not accidentally appear at the county jail going toward three o'clock in the morning.

These facts, too, were apparently dawning on Merritt. Lyle still held his gun in Merritt's general direction. Even if Merritt had had a gun, Barton believed he would not attempt to draw it. Once that night he had been beaten in an attempt to flash out a gun, and he knew Lyle by reputation.

So they all waited till another car stopped out in front. Presently Atchley appeared in the doorway; behind him was Bob Proctor.

"I'm sorry I had to haul you men out of bed," Barton said.

"That's all right," Atchley said. "What seems to be the trouble?"

"Oh, nothing much," Barton answered with lifted lip. "I'm only accused of trying to murder Merritt and attempting to rob the bank."

"And they arrested you for little things like those?" Atchley asked. "Dear me!"

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Nothing more was said for a space. It was the breathless time just before the July dawn, and the heaviness of the hour seemed to disincline the men toward talking. Back of the jail a cock crowed lustily several times.

"Yore ol' rooster says hit's time to get up," Lyle observed to Kennedy.

"What are we waitin' for?" Kennedy demanded. "What you-all keepin' that gun on Mr. Merritt fo'?"

"Was I keepin' a gun on *Mister* Merritt?" Lyle asked. "I hadn't noticed hit. Here, Barton, yo' can have that job for a while."

He handed Barton's gun back to him.

"Keep yore eye on him," Lyle said, and his tone had changed. "Don't let him make a move yo' don't like. Shoot him ef he stirs."

Kennedy, who had a mean man's mean temper, was roused by this action.

"What do you mean, Lyle?" he demanded. "What do yo' mean by armin' a man that's accused like this man is?"

Lyle's hands flashed to his belt. When they came up they held a gun apiece. At the same instant, apparently out of nowhere, two armed men also appeared in the two doorways of the jail. Lyle covered the sheriff, while the two other men put their guns on the three deputies.

"What is this, a hold-up?" Kennedy squeaked. "Who are these fellers, Lyle?"

"Put up yore hands, gentlemen," Lyle said. "Put 'em up quick."

Kennedy hesitated. The deputies glanced at each other sheepishly. Their hands went aloft. Kennedy looked at them out of a kind of helpless daze. Then his own hands went up.

"Will you two gentlemen kindly relieve them of any guns they may have?" Lyle asked Proctor and Atchley.

"With good will in large measure," Atchley said.

The guns were stacked up on a high bench which ran along one side of the wall. The four men put down their hands.

"Now what's the meanin' of this, Lyle?" Kennedy asked. "I'll have yo' stripped for this."

"You'll never have me stripped," Lyle said. "I'm the new sheriff of this here county. Ef you don't believe hit, take a look at this warrant from the judge for me to take charge. I'm to remain in charge till you have had yore trial. These men in the doorways is my new deputies. You three boys better git—an' git sudden."

The three deposed deputies left hastily, crowding past the men at the doors.

Kennedy finished reading the paper and lifted a blanched face to Lyle.

"What's hit all mean, Lyle?" he asked weakly.

"Hit means that the folks in this county is demandin' a new deal," Lyle said. "Hit means that they have done with a sheriff that will permit transportin' and storin' right in his own town. You better go an' get some rest, Kennedy. Yo' have had a hard day."

Kennedy glanced at Merritt pathetically, and then he, too, passed out of the room.

"Look out, Merritt!"

Barton's voice rang sharply through the room. The other men instinctively backed to the walls. All of them knew that Barton had flashed his gun too fast for Merritt the evening before, and they knew that he could handle Merritt now. It was the stray shot, the chance bullet, that they were backing away from.

Barton was crouching toward Merritt, his body perfectly still amid the stillness which suddenly filled the room. Merritt's right hand had come halfway down, so that the elbow was crooked in readiness for the hand's swift flight to the holster.

"Up!" Barton commanded. "Don't make me kill you, Merritt. I shorely

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will have to do it, if ever yore finger tips disappear inside that coat."

Barton did not know it, but one thing and one thing only, sent Merritt's hand aloft. That was Barton's reversion in the one word "shorely." That "shorely" convinced Merritt that Barton was in deadly earnest.

Lyle turned to the two men whom he had designated as his new deputies. The men nodded.

"Thirty gallons, an' we got hit," one said.

"Merritt," Lyle said sharply, "I arrest you for storing."

"To the devil with you-all," said Merritt. "I kin pay my fine."

"Don't deny hit, then?" Lyle asked. "Prove hit, yo' pup."

Barton had been watching Merritt intently. Now he tossed over his shoulder to Lyle:

"Ask the justice if I can have an immediate trial."

"Yo' kin have hit," Lyle said. "That's what I asked the justice to come down hyar for."

"Take Merritt's gun from him then," Barton said.

"Why, he hain't got no gun," said Lyle mockingly.

"He has a pistol in his holster," Barton said. "I saw the outline of the butt when he moved his arm. Take it from him."

Lyle walked over to Merritt, and Barton stepped closer to keep Merritt covered. Lyle took a pistol from Merritt's left-hand holster.

"How you have growed down, little gun," said Lyle apostrophizing the pistol. "A while ago you was a shotgun, an' now yo' are a pore feller that'll nicely fit a holster. Shouldn't wonder if we had better give this Barton a quick trial. You-all might turn into a pea shooter by sunup."

"Sit over here, Merritt," Barton ordered.

Merritt, straightening up a little from his usual posture, took the chair. He threw one huge leg over the other and folded his thick arms on his chest.

The justice assumed his proper magisterial air.

"How do you plead, Mr. Barton?" he asked.

"Not guilty," Barton answered.

"Let's hear your side of hit, Mr. Merritt," Reese requested.

"To the devil with you," said Merritt. "I'll go before the grand jury an' get an indictment."

"Are there any other witnesses?" Reese asked, looking about the room benignly. Lyle, too, looked all about, as if he were seeking some one, an exaggeration to torment Merritt.

"Well," said Reese, "in the absence of evidence the case against the defendant is dismissed. I believe there is another warrant, charging attempted burglary."

"I swore to no such warrant," said Atchley, "and don't intend to. And it's my bank."

"Who swore to the warrant?" the justice demanded.

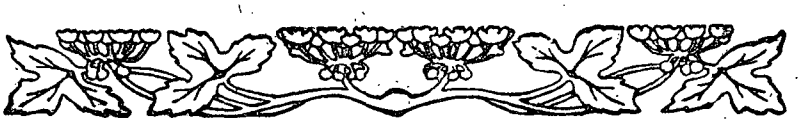
"One o' Kennedy's deputies, after Kennedy had talked to Merritt over the phone," Lyle said.

"Mr. Barton, you are free," said Squire Reese.

Barton looked at Proctor, and Proctor smiled till the wrinkles about his eyes deepened.

"Yes, Billy," Proctor said, "once in a while you get hit in the neck an' other times yo' don't."

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.



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Romanced to Freedom

By Murray Leinster

Author of "High Jinks in Denver," etc.

A BULLET plunked neatly between the horse's legs and spattered into a shapeless mass of lead against a boulder, from whence it went whining off into nowhere. That was one second. The next, the very young sheriff was off his mount and was jerking it behind an outcrop of rock. His head peered cautiously around it a little later, but with perfect caution. He could see, but he would not be seen. A long blue barrel came around the ledge.

The valley was empty. All raw red earth and barren rocks, there was no trace of vegetation save down at the very bottom, where a stream might run if it rained, which was improbable. The naked rocks were just beginning to cool a little from their midday heat, and on the farther side the shadows began to take on those strangely beautiful purple tints that come in high, thin air at nightfall.

Suddenly the sheriff's horse stirred, and its shod hoofs clinked musically. As if it were a signal, there was a shot from below. The sheriff heard it sing above his head, and then it spitefully hissed into red clay. The crack of the rifle the other man was using echoed and reëchoed thinly among the cliffs. The sheriff fired, and fired again, then squinted wisely at the sun. Two hours more of daylight, perhaps—no more.

Now he began to survey the ground before him. The other man would wait for nightfall, if he were wise—holding the sheriff here by rifle fire—and then make a bolt for it. And that was something the sheriff did not propose to allow. He began to map out a course for himslf, so that he would have cover in his proposed journeying, and yet manage to get close enough to spoil the other man's plan.

He was a very young man, the sheriff. A day of hard riding had not tired him, nor did he look upon his present task with either the phlegmatic calm of an older man, or the nervousness of the inexperienced. He was possibly twenty-five, and his attitude was eminently businesslike and yet pleasurably excited. Even in the least tamed of communities, a man hunt is not so common as to be altogether devoid of thrill. The man below had killed a Mexican deliberately. Therefore the sheriff was after him, and therefore he picketed his horse and wriggled carefully away from his first hiding place.

The location of the fugitive had been

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fairly well indicated by his shots. Modern firearms no longer emit a cloud of dense white smoke on being fired. A faint blue cloud that instantly dissipates is the most one can expect, but even that will show up to a watchful eye. The sheriff had placed his man behind a mass of detritus, fallen from the cañon sides. There would be room there even for a horse.

Pleasurably excited, the sheriff was not looking for unnecessary heroics. His object was to capture the man as promptly as possible and with the least damage. Therefore, instead of trying to make a frontal attack, involving a descent of the cañon wall under fire—which would have been sheer suicide—he actually moved back for some little distance and then walked cautiously for nearly a quarter of a mile. It was a pocket cañon, with a deep slide, where the sheriff's horse was waiting, and a narrow opening just opposite that spot.

Once he got down on hands and knees and crawled to the edge. In the gathering shadows he could just make out a huddled mass in the place he had picked out. As he watched, it moved slightly, and his suspicions were confirmed. The man was there. The sheriff drew back and walked quietly enough to a spot where he could clamber down unseen by his quarry. No more than half an hour after the first interchange of shots he was intrenched behind a huge flat rock on the cañon floor, completely commanding the entrance, with his repeating rifle. And then he settled himself comfortably, even lighting a cigarette. As he thrust back his sack of tobacco, a comforting little rustle in the same pocket, just over his heart, made his expression soften a trifle.

The sun sank down and down. It was gone, with a bewildering flash of momentary green that sometimes shows above mountains on the far horizon. And then the shadows deepened. Darkest purple and palest lavender, they made the gloomy rocks and forbidding cliffs into places of colorful beauty. Mystery was there and allurement, in the crenelated turrets of naked rock and strange fortresses of gullied clay. And romance was there, too, in the person of a young man who smoked behind a flat rock on which he rested a rifle and dreamed dreams concerning a small letter that rested in his pocket. From a girl, of course. He became lost in formless thoughts of her, while he waited for a murderer to come out, for the night to be stabbed by spiteful flashes of crackling flame, and for whining bullets to come about his ears.

Far in the east the horizon lightened the barest trifle. Soon the moon would rise. Now would be the time of course.

Like a ghost he came, his horse's feet making no sound. He rode swiftly, bent low in the saddle, expecting futile shots from behind him to follow. Instead, the young sheriff dropped his cigarette.

"Damn!" he said softly. "Muffled his horse's hoofs."

There was no time for a hail or stern command to halt. The young sheriff fired quickly and heard the impact of his bullet, so still was the night. And then he heard a queer sound from the horse's throat, and it pitched forward clumsily and lay sprawled out, kicking more and more feebly.

Flinging himself at the heap of horse and man, his rifle discarded, but a revolver ready, the sheriff dragged a writhing figure from the mass.

"Easy!" he said curtly. "I've got you!"

He drew out the other man's gun and felt him for other weapons. He was curiously silent, the fugitive.

"Guess we'll camp," commented the sheriff a moment later. "Hike back in the morning."

A sudden curiosity made him strike a match, and then an exclamation was wrenched from him at the sight of the

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bearded, sun-tanned face that was smiling oddly at him.

"Dick!"

The match dropped and went out in its fall, leaving the two men staring at each other with momently flame-dazzled eyes in a world gone black. There was silence for perhaps half a minute, then a queer noise. The sheriff was shivering.

"My Lord!" he whispered. "Dick!"

The prisoner smiled whimsically in the darkness.

"You've no idea, Jerry, what a temptation it was to plug you when you first showed up. You made a beautiful target, but I tried for your horse and wanted to be sure of missing you, so I fired too low."

The sheriff's voice was strained.

"But are you—are you the—the Andrews that killed that Mex?"

"I'm afraid I am, Jerry." The tone was not mocking, nor even light. It was curiously sympathetic. "There are times when I regret being a black sheep. It must be pretty tough to go out after a murderer and find him your own brother."

The sheriff turned suddenly. His words were muffled.

"We'll make camp. Here, let me take off that rope." He stumbled away after loosening his captive's bonds. "You—you'll wait here until I lead my horse down. Supplies on my saddle."

Dick heard him going clumsily, and Dick seemed to be debating a bolt in his absence. He glanced at the desert beyond the cañon, but then shook his head.

"Couldn't make it," he murmured to himself. "And he'd track me in the morning."

There were quite forty miles of desert ahead of him, if only a dozen behind him. He could not cross that waterless country without more than one canteen of water, and it would be a terrible journey without a horse. He went over to his mount. It was still now. He ran a hand caressingly down the horse's stiff muzzle.

When the sheriff came back, Dick was sitting on a flat rock, puffing soberly on a cigarette.

"Some yucca over yonder, Jerry," he said soberly. "Light one and camp by it?"

The young sheriff nodded and followed in silence. His horse ambled contentedly behind him. When the prickly, oily bush began to flare up, his face was haggard. There were new deep lines about his mouth.

The prisoner glanced up gently, as his brother flung himself down.

"What're you going to do, Jerry?"

The sheriff flung out his hand.

"Take you in," he said hoarsely. "I've got to!"

Oddly enough the prisoner seemed to be the less moved of the two. He was grave, yes, but he seemed to be thinking more of the sheriff than of himself.

"And what do you suppose will happen, Jerry?"

"They'll probably hang you." The sheriff was speaking through stiff lips. "I don't know what defense you've got, but they told me a man named Andrews had ridden into Potosi, looking for a Mex named Pedro Cordoba. He found the Mex in a *cantina,* and the Mex and Andrews clinched. Andrews went for the Mex with bare hands, roaring that he was going to kill him. The Mex drew a knife, and Andrews got it away from him and killed him—with his hands."

Dick nodded soberly. "That's right, Jerry. Just what I did. But will they hang me for that?"

"I'm afraid they will, Dick. You were looking for him. He was trying to defend himself."

There was silence for a time, while the leaves of the clump of Spanish bayonet flared up and died, and only the oily

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stalk in the center burned on with little licking flames. The flickering light shone weirdly upon the two figures, dusty and travel-stained. The young sheriff's eyes were dark and full of pain. The prisoner was smiling gravely at the fire.

"You couldn't let me go, Jerry?"

"No, I couldn't let you go. If I'd known it was you, Dick, I'd have sent a deputy after you. Why did you let me catch you?"

A moment's pause.

"I knew you were the sheriff," said the prisoner gently. "I couldn't kill you very well. I tried for your horse, but fired too low. I wanted to be sure of missing you."

"You might have winged me, Dick! Oh, if you only had!"

The prisoner looked up somberly.

"You're thinking it will hurt dad and mother?"

Again the sheriff groaned. The prisoner stirred.

"I'm the black sheep, Jerry," he said slowly. "They expect something of the sort from me, you know. But it will be tough."

Perhaps in the firelight, perhaps in the thin smoke, perhaps in the purple shadows that were slowly being lightened by the first pale rays of the thin sickle moon, a picture seemed to form. It was of a ranch house shining in the sunlight, nestled among a grove of cottonwood trees. There was water there and grass, and there were cattle in herds about it, grazing. It seemed that the lazy contentment and perfect peace of the place added a certain glamour to the vision. Even the noise of many hoofs, that faint and indefinable sound of cattle grazing contentedly, came to the sheriff through the dimness.

And then his brother moved suddenly, and the vision vanished. But the sheriff could still feel the atmosphere of his home, and he could foresee with pitiless clarity what his brother's hanging would mean to his parents. Pride humbled and fresh disgrace—and even Dolores would be pained. She had liked Dick, though she had shyly promised to marry Jerry. She would find it difficult to understand the conception of duty that would make him take in his own brother to be hung. And her father, Don Luis, would storm and greet Jerry with a perfect Castilian courtesy that would somehow fail of being convincing.

There was no great happiness ahead for the sheriff. He stared at the fire, while his mouth twisted, as if he were tasting something of surpassing bitterness. His brother, across the fire, shot a look at him that was whimsical and curiously tender, the tenderness of which only a man is capable. He opened his mouth, hesitated, and then spoke.

"Heard from home lately, Jerry?"

"Last week," said the sheriff weakly. "All well."

Dick looked away.

"Dolores?"

"I heard from her at the same time."

There was a long silence, and then the prisoner shrugged oddly.

"I'd better tell you, Jerry. I was at home a few days ago."

His expression was of one who speaks against his will and hating to say a thing that will be painful. The sheriff listened dully.

"You were home?"

"I'd gone back," said Dick gravely, "to tell them I'd quit. To tell them I was going to try to face the music and straighten up. Not very easy for me, Jerry, because there are a few things I'd have to pay for, answer for, before I could come out in the open. I wish you'd let me go, old fellow. Dad would like it."

The sheriff clenched his hand tightly and drew a deep breath.

"Dick," he said steadily, "I've caught you. I wish I hadn't, but I have. And I—I took an oath of office. If you try

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to get away, Dick, I'll try not to kill you, but I'll have to get you again, and I'll do it."

A ghost of a smile showed in the prisoner's face.

"Thought so, Jerry. That's the way we were raised." He paused and looked at the dim glow of the burning yucca root. "But at home, there—you'd never heard of this Cordoba I killed, had you?"

In the paling light the sheriff's face could barely be seen. The moon had risen behind him and lightened the broad brim of his hat, casting a faint shadow even in the firelight's circle. His prisoner seemed not to need a reply. He went on, staring at the fire.

"He had been there, at Don Luis' hacienda. He was a low-class Mexican, and you know that Don Luis is a real Spaniard, *gente de razon*, he calls himself. But this Cordoba had the impertinence to make eyes at Dolores."

At the sudden movement of the sheriff, a note crinkled softly in his shirt pocket. The other man stared into the fire.

"Don Luis had him kicked off the place. His *vaqueros* handled him pretty roughly. Cordoba vanished. Two or three days after that, Dolores started to ride over to see dad and mother. Don Luis, as you know, allowed her a lot of freedom."

An inarticulate sound came from the sheriff. Beads of perspiration came out upon his forehead.

"She didn't come back. They found her with a bullet through her heart. Sorry, Jerry."

For a full minute there was a dead silence. The sheriff barely moved, but his eyes closed tightly. A little later the breath rasped sobbingly in his throat.

"And you see, Jerry, I knew what you'd do. You'd have followed him and killed him, wouldn't you?"

"Yes!" The sheriff's voice was very strange.

Dick nodded quietly, staring into the fire.

"There wouldn't have been much thought of the law for you, old fellow. But it wouldn't have done. One killer in the family was bad enough. You are an officer of the law, sworn to uphold it. If you'd gone and killed him—as you would have done—it would have looked rather bad for us. There'd have been two black sheep, both of us outlawed most likely, and you'd be in particularly bad because an officer of the law isn't supposed to exact private revenge. So I—well, I'm not much good, Jerry. I know it. I made them promise at home not to let you know for a little while. Then I stared after Cordoba. I found him, Jerry."

Silence again. When the sheriff spoke, it seemed as if his throat were swollen.

"I—I see. You killed him to—keep me from doing it."

The moon, climbing over a grotesque mass of rock shaped in the form of a goblin's castle, saw the two men seated by their dying fire. A single horse browsed in the shrubbery, not far away. One man gazed at the expiring flame. The other was very, very still.

It was a long time latter that the sheriff found his voice, and then it was thick and dulled.

"You'll have to ride on to-night, Dick," he said with difficulty. "I left word for my two deputies to follow me. They'll trace our trails without any trouble, and they ought to be here early to-morrow. Take my horse and go."

Slowly the prisoner rose. Slowly he picked up his weapons, the sheriff watching apathetically. He moved off into the darkness and came back leading the sheriff's horse. He looked down at his brother.

"Jerry!"

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The sheriff looked up and smiled in a fashion that was pure agony.

"Good-by, Dick, and good luck. But I wish you'd let me kill him."

A moment's pause, and Dick's mouth twisted queerly.

"I can't do it!" His voice broke. "Blast you, Jerry——"

The sheriff started up, and his late prisoner swung quickly and powerfully for his jaw. The sheriff was flung back and down and lay still on the earth. And then Dick threw himself upon him.

A trickle of water down his throat and a hand working expertly at the third vertebra—which will bring a man out of any unconsciousness that is not coma—were his first sensations, as the sheriff came slowly back to the world. His brother's face was above him, and there were tears in the older man's eyes.

"I couldn't do it, Jerry. I lied to you."

The sheriff struggled to move and could not. His brother erect, smiling queerly.

"Old fellow, I'm the most worthless human being in the universe, but I couldn't go away and let you believe that yarn, even for an instant. I haven't been home, Jerry, and I followed Cordoba from Chihuahua. He hasn't been there, either. Dolores is all right—she must be all right."

There was a moment in which the sheriff drank in the assurance, and then he struggled with his bonds. Dick watched him. He relaxed.

"I did kill Cordoba, Jerry," said Dick slowly, "because three months ago, down in Chihuahua, just what I told you of Dolores, happened to another girl. She was going to marry me the next day, but Cordoba put a bullet through her heart to keep me from having her. I'm going back there now. Her father and I—well, her father is a very proud old gentleman, like Don Luis, and he looks on me rather as his son. But I had to get Cordoba."

Slowly, in spite of his bonds, the sheriff managed to smile.

"I wouldn't have let you go, except for that yarn."

"And I couldn't take it, Jerry. But I could knock you out and rope you. There's no disgrace in losing a prisoner."

The sheriff was still smiling wryly.

"No, Dick, I guess there ain't. And there'll be no come-back to dad."

Dick hesitated and then said somewhat wearily.

"Don't expect you to believe me, but that's my only reason for wanting to get away. The girl that Cordoba killed —I loved her, Jerry."

He stood up and climbed into the saddle.

"You said your deputies would be here early to-morrow. In case they don't, I've fixed that rope so you can wriggle free in a couple of hours. And there's a canteen. It's only twelve miles to a ranch where you can get a horse. 'By, Jerry."

The sheriff managed to grin faintly.

"Good-by, Dick. And—and——" A sudden wave of comprehension came over him. His brother felt now, just as he had felt when he had believed the tale that was told him. His tone was sincerely sympathetic. "I'm sorry, Dick. Good luck!"

The thudding of the horse's hoofs died away in the distance, and then a long time later the sheriff began to work on the ropes that bound him.

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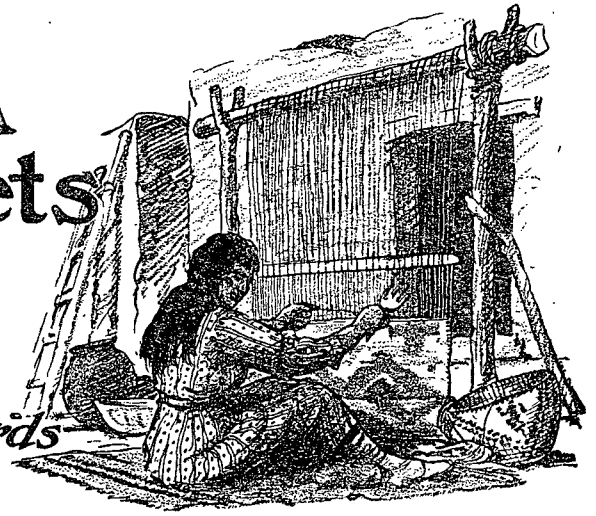
Indian Blankets

by

E. Clark Richards



Author of "The Pottery of the American Indian," etc.

IN the understanding of the general public the term Indian blanket has come to mean a rug or woven product of the Navajo Indians. For many years the products of the Navajo looms have become so well known that the impression has gone abroad that they are the only weavers among our native American tribes. It is true that they are the most celebrated of our Indian weavers, but a number of the Pueblo tribes of New Mexico and Arizona are equally expert in the art of weaving blankets, girdles, and similar objects.

The origin of weaving among American Indians is shrouded in much obscurity. Many of our aboriginal tribes were doubtlessly given to twine weaving, the coarse weaving of threads and cords of twisted bark. Wild flax or the agave was also employed in this way. Many of the tribes linguistically related to the Navajos, such as the Lipans, the Apaches, and others, were familiar with this crude type of weaving. Much historical data has been brought together to show that the various Pueblo people raised some kind of wool-bearing animal to supply the raw materials of weaving. At the time of their southward migration, before the advent of Europeans in this country, the Navajos learned the art of weaving from the Pueblos.

The Hopi pueblos of northeastern Arizona still raise some cotton, and the Pima Indians of southern Arizona raised and used cotton fiber in weaving. Many elaborate examples of their handicraft have been discovered, and at the time of the visit of Marcos de Nica, in 1539, the Pimas proudly pointed out to their distinguished European visitor that the Zuni wove cloth as fine as the material which composed his robe. When Antonio de Espejo, a wealthy Spanish gentleman, visited New Mexico in 1583, the Hopi Indians threw down upon the ground before his horse great quantities of woven cotton cloths, such as they still use as ornamental waist cloths.

To-day the Navajos are rightly regarded as the greatest of the weaving tribes. With the advent of cheap cloth the Indian art of weaving has been subjected to the same fierce competition which has destroyed the native arts of basketry and pottery. The Navajos, however, have continued to produce blankets and articles of great artistic

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variety and superior finish, and their products find a ready market. For a time the spirit of commercialism threatened to destroy both the beauty and value of their looms, but better influences were brought to bear on the weavers, and they have abandoned commercial dyes and cheap materials and returned to their valid primitive methods.

In the designing of patterns the Navajos have shown an almost inexhaustible fertility. Occasionally the decoration is apparently unintelligible, because the various figures have become so highly conventionalized that it is extremely difficult to trace them back to their prototypes. Bands or straight lines are very common, while the lozenge or diamond is frequently employed. These are often followed by zigzag lines to symbolize lightning, and the cross is employed to represent the morning or evening star, or the four points of the compass. A rain cloud is denoted by a terraced pyramid, and the lozenge, which is two of these figures, placed base to base, symbolizes the same idea in a more complex way.

These constant references to the life-giving properties of water, and the lightning and thunder acompanying the storm cloud, are indisputable evidence that these designs originated among the Hopi, the Zuni, and other Pueblo Indians. It is quite easy to understand that the cult ceremonials of a people living in an arid country should gather round the storm cloud. The Navajos are of northern origin, and their sacred symbols were borrowed from their first teachers in the noble art of weaving.

About 1680 the natives of the pueblos of Jemez, Acoma, Zuni, and probably Tusayan, were incorporated into a single federation. The decorative art of the Navajos and their textile fabric patterns were unquestionably strongly influenced by this absorption of foreign tribes. The present-day Navajo Corn Clan and the High House Clan are composed of the descendants of these incorporated people.

The Navajos continue to use some dyes obtained from Mexicans and white traders, but their own dyes are much more charming as well as lasting. To obtain their native colors a decoction of various plants is employed in connection with ashes of juniper. A crude native alum serves as a mordant. Black and red are the principal colors, but the almost endless grouping of bars, diagonals, and diamonds, is often varied with green and yellow. To obtain the best black, twigs and leaves of the sumac are made into a concoction in which roasted ocher or ferruginous earth is mixed. The gum of the pinon pine is ground up with this, and a blue-black color is obtained. Yellow is obtained both from the flowering tops of a plant called *Bigelovia graveolens,* and from a certain root. Red is made from the bark of a species of the alder.

All Navajo blankets are single-ply, with the design, no matter how elaborate, alike on both sides. Each color and portion of the design calls for a separate skein, shuttle, or thread, so that in the course of manufacture a great number of these shuttles hang suspended from the blanket. Strictly speaking, no shuttle is used by the Navajos. The yarn is wound on a slender twig and passed through the warp threads on this piece of wood.

The Navajos still employ their crude home-made looms, and their methods have not been changed by the introduction of mechanical appliances. This is also true of the few remaining Pueblo tribes who continue to weave blankets. With some notable exceptions, the Navajo women are the weavers. The blanket loom is set up by planting two posts, sufficiently removed from one another to admit of the piece to be woven. Cross pieces are lashed to these posts, one above and one below, composing a square frame to retain the posts in position. A

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separate piece, consisting of a rod, is then attached to the upper cross piece or brace, by means of a rope or heavy cord spirally applied. This rod is parallel with the upper brace and is about ten or twelve inches beneath it. A second pole is then similarly attached by spiral wrappings to the rod above, and only two or three inches removed, to which is secured the cord forming the upper border cord of the blanket, and to which in turn the upper ends of the warp are attached.

A similar brace being at the bottom of the loom, a rod like that at the upper end is similarly secured by the aid of spiral wrapping with cord. To this rod is secured the bottom border cord of the blanket, the distance between the two border cords forming the length of the blanket.

For weaving sashes, belts, garters, and hair bands, a more complicated mechanism is required. These articles are often woven by attaching one end of the warp cords to the top of a vertical pole, or the rafters of a room. Usually in this case the weaver seats herself flat upon the ground with her legs extended, and then a cross piece, to which the gathered cords of the warp are secured, is placed against the soles of her feet. In this instance she weaves forward from the body toward the feet.

The aboriginal Indian female dress was composed of two blankets. These were of exactly the same pattern and were stitched together along the edges. At the sides openings were left for the arms, and no sleeves were used. This picturesque garment, examples of which can be seen in some of our Indian museums, has long since given away to the ready-made garments of the stores. Even Indian maidens are not immune to "stylishness."

To produce wool for their weaving products the Navajos raise large herds of sheep. Good blankets are not as readily obtained as formerly, for the weavers are neither as numerous nor as expert as they once were. The older and finer examples of their looms are justly prized and bring large prices. In the last few years more careful methods have been revived among them, and good Navajo blankets have again secured a ready appreciation with people who have a true discernment for the beauty of primitive handicrafts. Recently the writer went to see a collection of these blankets in one of the better shops of New York, and the excellence of the weaving and the beauty of the coloring were beyond dispute. A color combination of black and gray was particularly effective.

America has been very slow to realize that her genuine native art is not to be found in a tepid imitation of her European masters, but in the basketry, the pottery, and the weaving of her native Indian tribes. When the real story of our native contribution to the arts comes to be written, the American Indian woman, with her baskets, her bottles, and her blankets, will come into her own.

LARGE COAL DEPOSITS OPENED IN WYOMING

FIVE miles east of Gilette, Wyoming, a new coal deposit was recently opened. Significance attaches to this new field of coal operations, because this is said to be the third largest deposit of coal in the world. The vein extends to a depth of 95 feet and covers an area of 800 acres. Only two other fields in the world are larger, it is claimed, one in France and one in Australia. But the Gillette field has this advantage over the other two: they are not uniform or constant in character, it is said, whereas the Gilette field is of uniform character.

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The Call of the Trail

By Reginald C. Barker

THERE'S a voice that is calling
From out in the forest;
There are peaks that are waiting,
All silent and pale;
There's a balm that will cure
When the heart is the sorest—
The lure of the camp fire,
The call of the trail.

There's an eagle that's soaring
Far up in the azure;
There are deer that are sleeping
Below in the swale;
There are pine trees that sway
To a symphonic measure;
The river is roaring:
"Come back to the trail."

There's no use resisting
The voice from the forest;
There's no use in waiting.
You know that you'll fail.
The call comes alike
To the richest and poorest—
The lure of the camp fire,
The call of the trail.

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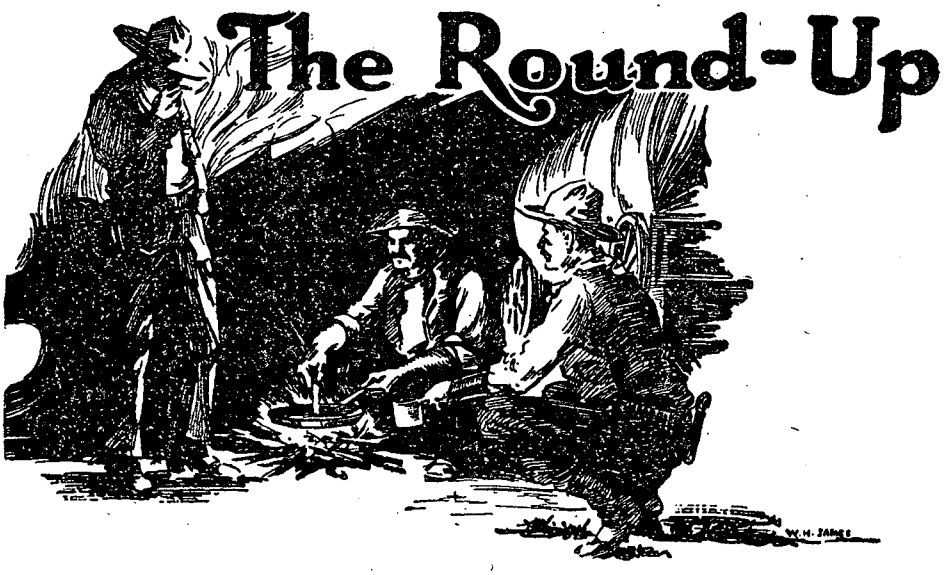
The Round-Up



ONE of the boys gave us a lot of information last week at the Round-up as to ropes. Al Jensen, of Cordelia, California, has a powerful lot of good stuff about saddle blankets. He's goin' to preface it with a few general remarks on ropes.

"DEAR BOSS AND FRIENDS: About ropes: I prefer a seven sixteenth inch Manila, the kind known as 'Silk Giant.' The genuine old Tom Horn—Manila—was a good one, but it is now almost impossible to get the genuine. The hair lariat is a joke. Have used hair ropes for a mecate on a hackamore, but only on a gentle horse. I don't like 'em for anything, not even to scare snakes away, as I saw a rattler crawl over one five times on the South Fork of Powder River, Wyoming, one day, so I didn't string one around my bed any more afterward. I believe a maguey rope is O. K. for light saddle work, especially calves, but I don't like them for heavy work; they don't stand the strain. In Wyoming, where I learned the art of roping, most of the men tie hard and fast in saddle work, so you need both a good rope and a good 'rig.' My favorite length of saddle rope is 35 or 40 feet. I've seen men carry 60 feet, but never saw one throw it all. Maybe it can be done, but I never saw it.

"As for saddles, my favorite tree is the Montana, 16-inch fork. The Bull Noose—16-inch and 18-inch fork—I have seen used by some riders, but they are too hard to get out of; and in a mountain country, where a horse is apt to fall, I don't want them. The Montana—16-inch fork—gives you plenty of 'knee holt' on a bucker, yet you can easily jump clear of the saddle in case of a fall.

"I like small, round skirts, single-rigged. I've roped everything from calves to grown bulls with a single rig, tied hard and fast to the horn, and have never busted a cinch. I always use a soft cotton cinch, but I change 'em before they are so far gone that they hold by only a string or two.

"I've never heard any one say a thing about saddle blankets. Why not? They are a lot more important than hair lariats. My favorite is made of horsehair, made by myself. I'll tell you how it's done. Maybe some one else has a better idea, but here's mine: First I take two burlap grain sacks and cut 'em wide open. I lay one out flat on the floor. Then I get a lot of clean horse-

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hair, a couple racks full, and 'strip it out'—that is, I string small bunches out straight and untangle them. Then I lay them across the sack, all one way, till the sack is well covered; they alternate, running the hair the opposite way, keeping this up until the hair is piled up about 8 inches deep. Then I lay the other sack on top, sew around the edge, and tack it through the middle in a dozen places, as a woman tacks a quilt. Wet thoroughly with cold water, put it on your hoss, and saddle up for a short ride to give it shape. After it dries, use it steadily until it is mashed down to about 1½ inches thick, then cut the sacking off and trim the edges even with your saddle skirts. These blankets are easily cleaned by throwing them in cold water and shaking well. If kept clean, they never cause a sore back, like so many wool blankets do. They are not much for looks, but they are bears for wear, and comfortable to the horse. A good plan is to have your harness maker sew a piece of light leather on each side where the cinch rings touch.

"I agree with Harry Webb about the rope strap. It's always on the right side unless ordered the other way by the buyer. Personally, I've never seen a left-hand rope strap. Have I said too much? When I get going, it's hard to stop. Well, here's luck to WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, staff, readers, and all."

Thanks, Al, for your talk. It sure was informative, and we enjoyed it. Good luck to you, Al, from the staff and from all the gang.

NITRATES IN SOUTHEASTRN CALIFORNIA

LARGE quantities of nitrogen are needed for use in fertilizers, in engineering and mining explosives, and in munitions made for national defense in war. During the World War the demand for nitrates was so urgent that every known source of them in the United States was searched to find enough to supply the ever-increasing needs.

Small quantities of nitrates are found in almost every region where the rainfall is slight. The most promising deposits in this country are those in the Amargosa region, in southeastern California. Before the war some of these deposits had been examined by private companies that sought to obtain capital for their exploitation. The reports, however, were very conflicting, and the United States geological survey thereupon decided to make a careful study of the deposits in this region.

The nitrate-bearing material, called in California "caliche," is similar in character and mode of occurrence to the well-known caliche found in Chile, but it is much poorer and thinner. It forms a layer a few inches thick, and this lies less than a foot beneath the surface. The bedrock in this region consists chiefly of beds of Tertiary clay shale and the top-clay soil. A white powder layer, composed chiefly of sulphate of sodium and calcium, lies between the caliche and the clay soil. The caliche cuts across successive tilted beds of the underlying clay shale, and is thus clearly independent of the geological structure.

At many places the geological survey made maps and cross sections in their examination of the region. Scores of trenches and hundreds of pits were dug down to and into the bedrock, and the soil, caliche, and bedrock were systematically examined. The commercial development of these deposits was seen to be impracticable, but the examination sets at rest any uncertainties as to the nature or quantities of the nitrates in the examined areas. Moreover, these tests will serve as a guide in the exploration of other supposed nitrate-bearing regions.

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The Swapper's Exchange is conducted for our readers. As explained in the Round-up of the March 25th issue we must make a flat-rate charge of one dollar for each ad received after April 1st. While this is the charge for one insertion of an advertisement, we will, if space permits, run it again without extra charge. On account of the necessity for making up a magazine in advance of publication date, it will be about eight weeks before your advertisement will appear. It must be distinctly emphasized that any who take advantage of this service, do so with the complete understanding that the Editor and Publishers of this magazine will not hold themselves responsible in any way for losses sustained by readers, nor can they act as arbiters in disputes. A remittance should be sent with each advertisement, addressed to "Swapper's Exchange," Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

RIFLE, 8 mm Mauser; .22 hi-power Savage; .22 Winchester; 20-gauge pump gun; .38 and .45 Colt revolvers, .32 automatic pistol; No. 0 and No. 3 Kodaks; 8- and 12-power binoculars; Luger 9 mm, with 8-inch barrel. In exchange I want firearms or cash. O. C. Adams, North Canton, Connecticut.

ANTIQUE GUNS: wheel-lock, flintlock; rare pistols and revolvers; Indian relics; weapons from Australia, Africa, Philippines, and all parts of the world; rare Indian pottery; World War relics; 1,001 curious and rare things. Send for list and let me know what you have to exchange. G. R. Moore, 615 North Pearl Street, Janesville, Wisconsin.

CAMPING OUTFIT, complete; jointed steel Sunnybrook fishing rod, 5½ feet long; Pennell reel; fifty yards silk line; three bamboo fishing poles with lines, floats, sinkers, and hooks; Winchester repeating rifle, .22, 16 shot; Old Sol spotlight. I want a C melody saxophone, Buescher, Conn, or Holton preferred; 12-gauge Remington automatic; wireless outfit complete—or what have you? C. Wilbur Parrish, Blue Mound, Illinois.

CHAPS, leather, with 11-inch wings; bull rig for riding bulls; hand-made spurs; bridle; bucking rolls; lariat rope; hackamore with rope; 40 acres of land, will raise anything. For particulars of swap address Buck Phillips, Coos County, Myrtle Point, Oregon.

LAND: 40 acres in heart of Ozarks, ten miles from Hot Springs, Arkansas, 25 acres cultivated and 15 acres in timber; has house 20x40, barn, and other outbuildings. For further information address Box 4A, Route 1, Pearcy, Arkansas.

GUN, Colt cap and ball, 5 shot, used in Civil War; mold, powder, and flask and a few caps. Will swap for a young timber wolf—or what am I offered? Henry C. Schmitt, 39 Hall Street, Elmhurst, L. I., N. Y.

TRICKS; books; skates, et cetera. Send for list and further particulars. Charles Lelack, 2503 St. Clair Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

FARM, of 27 acres, five miles from Batavia, Genesee County, New York; six-room house, small barn, hen house, good well. For particulars of swap address A. T. Garrett, 13 Ganson Avenue, Batavia, New York.

POEM, of real Western life. Will swap a typewritten copy for cash—or what articles am I offered? V. N. Veatch, Box 56, Route 3, Rocky Ford, Colorado.

MAIL-ORDER PLAN, a real money maker, to swap. For particulars address H. A. Dodd, 920 North Carolina Avenue, S. E., Washington, D. C.

BIRD DOGS, PUPS, thoroughbred English setters, about six months old. What useful articles am I offered in exchange? L. E. Reed, Como, Tennessee.

ENCYCLOPEDIA, of law, in 12 volumes, by Chadman. Will swap for a typewriter. C. R. Sparks, State Sanitarium, Rockville, Indiana.

GUN, Stevens 12-gauge pump; new .22 target revolver; .22 target pistol; .45-70 Springfield carbine; 12-gauge, double-barreled, hammerless shotgun; bicycle; tent; other articles. Will swap for cash, .25-35 carbine, .22 Colt automatic, steel traps—or what have you? Walter Johnson, Chassell, Michigan.

BITS AND SPURS, hand made, silver laid and engraved; these are in stock or will be made to order by a former cowboy who is now in stir. The bits will be swapped for $15 to $25, the spurs from $5 to $15, postage prepaid. Lloyd H. Woodress, Box 58, Boise, Idaho.

PUPS, genuine black and tan, about six months old, from the best tree-dog stock. I want a Winchester repeating hammer shotgun, or field glasses. Nothing else will be considered. L. H. Douglass, Fairfield, Ohio.

MOTION-PICTURE MACHINE, complete, 1921 model, a road outfit. I will swap this for cash. Also I have 5x7 plate camera to trade for a typewriter or most anything to the value of $50. C. E. Pierce, Box 50, Big Fork, Montana.

WATCH, 15-jeweled Elgin, with 20-year case; complete course in showcard writing, never used; two steel fishing rods with reels; 16-gauge shell belt, 3 inches wide. Will trade the lot for a high-grade, 12-gauge pump or double-barreled gun. George Hamner, 1111 South Davis Avenue, Elkins, West Virginia.

PISTOL, Colt .38 automatic, government model; new box of cartridges; holster. Will swap for .32 automatic; Remington rifle; Army Winchester; .30-30 Savage; .303 or .30-30 Winchester carbine. Edwin W. Clark, Box 514, Placentia, California.

MOTOR CYCLE, Harley-Davidson, twin, and side car; mandolin-guitar; 60-egg Buckeye incubator; 6-8 vol. generator; 88-note player rolls; 10-inch Victrola records, and other articles. What useful things am I offered in exchange? O. Vach, 964 Pavilion Street, Cincinnati, Ohio.

PISTOL, Stevens diamond model; violet-ray machine, new; vest-pocket Kodak, with f 6.9 lens, new; Audion type radio receiving set; water motor; transformer for reducing voltage of house current. Among other things I want high-powered binoculars. Albert Micolites, 34 Colton Street, Worcester, Massachusetts.

RUGS, 10, genuine Navajo; 3 hand-forged bits, silver mounted; 8 horsehair belts; 1 Navajo squaw dress; numerous other articles. I want something useful in exchange. What have you? E. Pierson, Box B, Florence, Arizona.

CASH—to swap for used phonograph records, any language. George Hysler, Box 198, Katonah, New York.

MOTOR CYCLE, Indian twin, 1916 model; Master carburetor, complete, with manifold for Ford car, will give 25 to 40 miles per gallon; .41 D. A. Colt pistol with 6-inch barrel; and other things. I am interested in 20 or 28-gauge or .410 double-barreled, hammerless shotgun; Cipher 150 to 200-egg incubator—or what have you? E. A. L., 1506 Highland Avenue, Montgomery, Alabama.

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COURSE, in Physical Culture; course in mathematics; old coins; basket ball; cather's mitt, and other things. I want a .22 Remington repeater; .32 Colt automatic and holster; Kodak, or most anything useful. W. W. Shaw, 319 Prospect Street, Warren, Ohio.

PUNCHING-BAG OUTFIT, consisting of bag, gloves, spring rack, and bladder; various breeds of rabbits and poultry. Will trade for cash or typewriters, printers' supplies—or what have you? H. D. Easer, 154 Bigelow Street, Brighton, Massachusetts.

RADIOPHONES, one pair 3000 Ohm Holstzer-Cadot; Meyers Audion with receptacle; telegraph instrument; sword, with scabbard and belt. For further particulars write to Aram Parnag, 251 Shawmut Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts.

AUTO-KNITTER, Duplex, complete outfit. Will exchange for a wrist watch or a diamond. What have you to offer in this line? Otto Brey, 215 South Sixth Street, Fort Dodge, Iowa.

HAT, broncho model, adjustable embossed leather band, with saddle-cinch tie and rim 3 inches wide, worn only once; 2 casting rods, one 6, the other 7 feet long; 10 arrowheads and other things. Will swap for a Luger, Mauser, or Colt automatic. I will add a mandolin and instruction book if I get just what I want. H. Honold, 420 Superior Avenue, Sheboygan, Wisconsin.

RING, diamond, ⅜ karat less , valued at $75—to swap for a serviceable Western saddle and outfit. D. L. Bowen, Coolidge, Montana.

TIMBER LAND, 80 acres containing 3,300,000 feet of yellow fir, situated in big mining country, southern Oregon. For particulars of swap address C. L. Elliott, 45 Trinity Place, Portland, Oregon.

RANCH, 320 acres in Eastern Idaho, adapted to all kinds of small grain and potatoes; free range adjoining; is on main line O. S. S. Railroad. If you have anything to swap for this, write H. S. Thompson, 951 North Street, Chehalis, Washington.

HOUNDS: 6 male, 3 blue tick; one black and tan; one black-and-white Walker; one half hound, half bull, all good, clean dogs. Will trade any one of 'em for a good female 'coon dog. Floyd Gray, Box 15, Cameron, Illinois.

BICYCLES, 2, nearly complete; bicycle repairs; Parisian art needles; electrical coils; switches; two small motors; telephone repairs, et cetera. Will swap for 12 or 16-gauge pump gun—or what have you? R. E. Brittain, 511 South Arlington Street, Akron, Ohio.

SHOE SHOP, in small town, doing good business. For particulars address Peter's Shoe Shop, Covelo, California.

BUSINESS—mail-order premium and book; can be run in any home during spare time, and is profitable. In exchange I want real estate, patent rights—or what am I offered? For further particulars write P. T. Richards, Ferris, Illinois.

HENS, White Leghorns, Tom Barron's famous laying strain, 10 hens and cockerel; 1-2 hens and cockerel, selected breeders. In exchange I will consider a Colt .38 or S. & W. Special, with 5-inch barrel. J. C. Phillips, Whitegg Poultry Farm, Sinclairville, New York.

COURSE, in poultry raising, from building brooders to marketing fowl—to swap for boat, motor-cycle engine, typewriter, guns—or what have you? B. L. Walker, Stanley Apartment G, 4th and Center Streets, Little Rock, Arkansas.

PHONOGRAPH, Silvertone, with 28 double-faced records. In exchange I want a good cat and 'coon hound; must be open trailer and tree barker. Walker or Redbone preferred. A. F. Parons, R. D. No. 1, Charleston, West Virginia.

AUTO SPRAY, No. 1, for whitewash, et cetera; two Little Putnam stoves; two Dan Gordon game hens. Will swap for cash or S. P. .30-30 shells to the value of $15.50. A. E. MacKenzie, 3801 Ingomar Street, Washington, D. C.

COURSE, in law, 13 volumes; other books—to swap for Winchester .22 repeater, visible typewriter, or .45 S. & W. using clips and automatic cartridges, or .30-30 Winchester carbine. Also I have a dictionary to swap for vest-pocket camera. Austin Datson, Trammel, Va.

COLT, .38; .22 target pistol with 7-inch barrel; will swap for .45 single-action Frontier model pistol, with 6- or 7½-inch barrel, or .38 S. & W. Special, with 5½-inch barrel. Jack Ferguson, 503 North Hudson Street, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

CHANCE to farm on ranch in a country that seldom fails. What have you to swap? I handle any acreage from 80 to 5,000 near Winnipeg, Manitoba, in the famous Red River Valley. H. C. Webb, P. O. Box 5, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

DOG, half greyhound, half wolfhound, female, about 10 months old, has had no training. What am I offered in exchange? L. C. Butler, Mediapolis, Iowa.

FUR ROBES, genuine buffalo, lined; auto robe, with pockets for the hands. These are worth over $500. For particulars of swap address Frank V. Conarro, 300 Crescent Park, Warren, Pennsylvania.

LAND, 160 acres of timber in Southern Oregon, with house, barn, and small orchard and other outbuildings—to swap for 1922 Buick, Dodge, or light vehicle and—what else do you offer? Bud Hutcheson, Hotel Opera, Comercio 26 Nuero, Tampico, Tamps., Mexico.

DRILL, mechanic's electric, for three chuck high speed; imported German meerschaum pipe, colored, with 6-point buck on stem; set of valves for Maxwell motor. I will swap for double-barreled .410 shotgun—and what else am I offered? John F. Reynolds, Motor Route D, Box 47 E, San Antonio, Texas.

CAMERA, 8x10, view, with six holders and tripod and r. r. lens; mandolin and guitar. Will swap for Luger or Colt automatic—or what have you? H. Herdeman, 634 Third Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

NEVADA HAS A MOUNTAIN OF TOOTH POWDER

UNTIL very recently, it was thought that the mining activities of Nevada were confined entirely to silver, copper, and gold. But a discovery made twelve years ago by Mack Foster, an old "desert rat" and big-game hunter, indicates that a new mineral, which can be used in the manufacture of tooth powder, is found there in large quantities. The exact location of its supply is Mount Superdent. When Foster first reported the discovery of the mineral, he stated that he had found it efficacious in removing tobacco stains from his teeth, but no one seemed to pay much attention to him. Eventually, a man named Fenwick became interested in Foster's report. He became convinced that the mineral could be mined successfully and staked a claim to a large area where it is found. It is said that other persons who have been attracted to the project by Fenwick have experimented with the mineral, and that it can be used also as an ingredient for nail polish, silver polish, and even for a shampoo powder. The mountain is situated out in the sagebrush desert about thirty miles from Tonopah.

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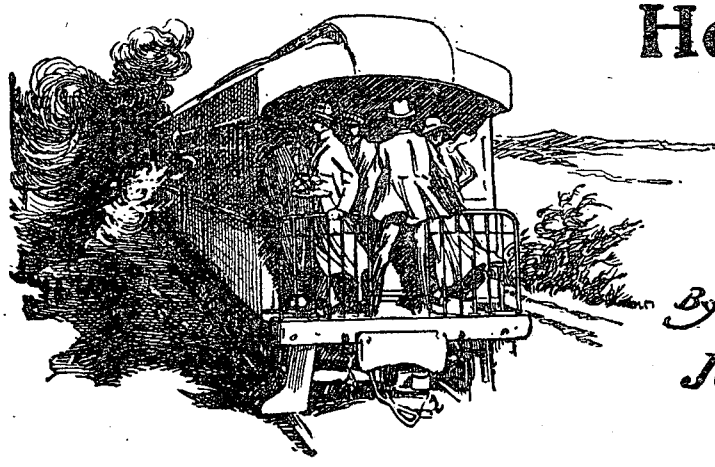
Where To Go and How To Get There



By John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

THE LUMBERJACK

THE American forest is one of the most wonderful places in the world, the richness, the beauty, and the variety of its growths being things that one may well marvel at, for the largest and oldest of forest trees are to be found here. It is not surprising that the woods have a charm for the young men of America, and that they turn to them much in the same way as the youth of maritime nations turn to the sea. They look to them for a living that will give them opportunities to be out in the fresh air instead of being cooped up in offices, and many a man who could have found ease and comfort in the city, has turned his back upon civilization and gone into the woods and spent his best years among the big timbers.

The history of the lumber industry contains much romance and many thrills. It has always been a calling that has attracted strong men, and in early colonial days the life of a lumberman, with its constant dangers from Indian foes, was even more hazardous than it is to-day, and called for unusual courage on the part of those who went into the unexplored forests to cut and haul the giant trees from the lonely places where they had stood for centuries. The pine trees of New England furnished many a mast for the sailing ships of the world, and the hardy lumbermen of those days could tell some stirring tales of the woods. Lumbering is a cinch in our time, compared to what it was then, when there was no machinery to make things easy, and a constant lookout had to be kept for lurking Indians, to whom the thickest forest was an open book, and whose principal diversion was springing unpleasant surprises on the white man. Then the lumber was used for dwellings and for ships, and, while square-hewn timber and huge masts were shipped to all parts of the world as fast as the lumber could be cut, the supply was so plentiful

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that the forest cover was scarcely broken. The English navy had the first choice, all its reserve being stamped with the broad arrow, and the rest being sold to private concerns and foreign navies.

The industry has grown to meet new demands since those days, and fabulous sums are now invested in timber limits, mills, and factories; many thousands of men are employed in the various branches; and an output worth over $1,000,000,000 is realized each year. It is surpassed in importance only by agriculture and the iron industry, thus ranking as the third of the world's great industries.

With all this the lumberjack hasn't changed very much. He is still the big, strong hewer of wood, as much a part of the forest as the birds and fur-bearing animals, in spite of modern machinery and modern comforts. He now sleeps in a bunk house, and every lumber camp contains a cook house, a mess hall, stable, blacksmith shanty, a company store, a portable electric battery, and often a small library. At the same time, it is a mistake to suppose that the life of a lumberjack is an easy one. While it has a certain charm and fascination, it also has a whole lot of hard work which has to be done under exacting conditions and in all sorts of weather. To work all day in a zero temperature, using an ax, pulling a saw, loading logs on sleds, or driving a team, gives one a good appetite for the evening meal, which is always an hour of conviviality.

The lumberjack is not the gentlest of human beings, and many jokes are played in camp, especially upon the newcomer, who has to be initiated, and who is the object of many tricks until he proves that he is made of the right stuff and is worthy to be one of the boys. A favorite little joke is to hide his clothes in the top of a high tree while he is in bed, and, when he climbs up to obtain them, two choppers will station themselves at the foot of the tree and proceed to chop it down. Unless he is very quick, he is likely to get a nasty fall or be pitched head foremost into a deep snowdrift, to the amusement of his tormentors.

The evening is spent in the bunk house, where songs are sung and yarns are spun, and legends of the old days, handed down from one generation to another, of Indians and hunts and fights and phantoms of the woods, are told again to amuse, astonish, or frighten the novices. Sometimes, the voice of Caruso, or some other great singer, will ring out on the frosty night air from the phonograph, followed by a last pipe, and the crowd turns in and sleeps as only those engaged in such occupations can sleep, until the morning whistle calls them to begin the work of a new day.

A LUMBERJACK ABOUT WOODEN RAILROADS

Dear Friend: I have noticed in the W. S. M. of September 16th something about wooden railroads, and that you would like to hear more about them, so here goes:

I am a lumberjack of the long and short timber, and have worked in the woods over twenty years. At Union City, Washington, is the lumber camp of the Dickinson Lumber Company. It is a small camp with about fifteen men working there, or what is called by the lumberjacks a one-sided outfit. It uses one steam donkey to log and load with, and one steam donkey on trucks, with flanged wheels on wooden or log rails, and another truck, with flanged wheels to carry the logs, which is coupled behind the other with the steam donkey on. This wooden railroad is three and a half miles long, and there is a one-and-three-quarter inch steel line which extends the full length of the wooden railroad, with eight wraps around the main drum on the steam donkey, so, whenever they want to run on this wooden railroad, the engineer starts the main drum a-rolling, and they pull themselves with the steel line. It takes almost one hour to carry one truckload down to the beach. That is all she can pull.

All the big lumber camps have steel rails. The wooden railroads have no advantage over the steel ones if one is logging on a

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large scale, for I remember times when we lumberjacks had to wait for the wooden rail steamer to take away the logs which we had piled sky-high.

This Dickinson Lumber Company at Union City was logging in 1918, and was the last wooden railroad lumber camp that I have worked in. I have also worked in the woods in Canada, but have never seen any wooden railroads there. I think the motor truck is better than the wooden railroad for hauling logs on a small scale.

Minot, N. Dak. JOHN PICO.

There is information right from the spot, and from a real lumberjack, too. Thanks, John. I like your letter, and I hope you will write me again and soon.

A TRAPPER OF THE CASCADES

WHEN Robert A. Lewellen, a native of Texas, but brought up in Montana, went to the Yukon country in Alaska almost twenty years ago, he decided to become a trapper. After trapping for four years in Alaska, where he had many thrilling adventures gathering pelts, he returned to the States and established headquarters at Bend, Oregon, where he makes his living by outwitting the furred folk of the forest.

Mr. Lewellen says that no man who has once made his living out in the open can ever return to the sedentary work of the city. And he gives as the reason for this statement the fact that out in the woods life has a new zest because the unexpected or the unusual is always turning up.

As an illustration of his meaning, he instances his encounter with a big grizzly in the Yukon territory. He and a friend called "Tex" came upon the tracks of a grizzly in the soft mud of the bank of the Davenport Creek. For seven hours Lewellen and Tex followed the trail of the bear until they came to the south slope of Monroe Mountain, where the tracks were getting fresh.

Tex decided the grizzly was heading back, and he swung to the north to head him off. Lewellen, when he reached the breaks of the creek, saw that the bear had slid down the bank and gone into the willows and crossed the stream. He then rolled a rock down the bank into the willows, and on the opposite side the bear came out into the open. For fully a minute the grizzly sat on his haunches and sized up his enemy; then he dropped to all fours and started up the hill. Lewellen took careful aim and fired. The soft-nosed bullet of his .32 pierced the grizzly's shoulder, went through his heart, and came out on the other side. This bear weighed over 1,400 pounds.

Mr. Lewellen says that it is a strange, but a true thing, that many good men who are fearless under all other circumstances become nervous in an encounter with a grizzly. He cannot explain the peculiarity, and he says he cannot understand it, except to compare it to the natural antipathy certain persons feel for cats.

Many years must elapse, he says, before the interior of Alaska is completely explored. There are stretches of hundreds of miles where the white man has never set a foot, and there are districts which afford excellent trapping in marten, mink, wolverine, lynx, fox, and other fur-bearing animals. One black fox which Mr. Lewellen trapped in the Yukon country he sold to a fur trader at Atlin for $1,100.

His present headquarters are in the Cascades, a wild country, so wild that sometimes he loses his way. He scorns the idea that a man cannot get lost in the woods and the mountains. The best woodsmen, he says, occasionally lose direction. When you get lost, he says, there is only one thing to do: keep a cool head and follow some stream until you strike a valley, or back-track to some landmark.

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Miss Louise Rice, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rice will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

NO time for the postmistress of The Tree to say a word this week. Gotta get right at these letters. Le's see—here's Brother Geste from away across the water, first.

DEAR LADY OF THE HOLLOW TREE: I just arrived in this country a few days ago from England, and before that I was in Spain; but you and the magazine in which I found you are not strangers to me. This is my first visit to North America, but I have a brother here who has been sending me your good magazine for over two years. You cannot imagine what a difference it made to me—all those letters that I have been reading in The Hollow Tree—when I arrived here. My brother is in the Middle West, and there was no one to meet me in New York; but I did not feel strange. I rode up to my hotel in a cab, and as we went by a certain street I remembered that that was where a fellow lived, who had written a capital letter that I had read, so I made the driver turn down that street, and we went very slowly by the house of the number given in that letter. I felt as if I was at home because I was sure I would like that letter writer. The next day I went down to Fifteenth Street and looked up at the big building that had "Street & Smith Corporation" on it, and I wondered which one of the windows hid The Hollow Tree and its postmistress. That gave me such a friendly feeling that I was very happy. I have some of the addresses of The H. T. Gang members in New York City, and before I go to join my brother I intend to write one or two of them and ask if I may see them.

It seems to me, Miss Rice, that this is a very unusual thing, and there is nothing in all of Europe that I know of like it. I'd like to place myself on record as wishing to be one of the Gangsters, and if you will send me a button I shall wear it with great pride. Very sincerely yours, JOHAN GESTE.

DEAR MISS RICE: I have been reading the W. S. M. ever since it first began, and I do like The Hollow Tree. I have been a traveling man for a long time, but now I am going to fulfill my great dream, which is to have a small farm and make my living that way. I would like to hear from any one who is doing this and raising any small, highly specialized crops.

"FARMER JOHN."

We have this brother's address and will forward any mail.

DEAR MISS RICE AND GANG: Say, won't some of The Hollow Tree sisters write to me? I am a real outdoor girl and dearly love it, too. I have a horse, and I think that there is more fun in riding than in anything I've run up against yet. I am one of the athletes in our school, and I would like to hear from other girl athletes.

KATHERINE MCKEE.

Haynesville, La.

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DEAR MISS RICE: I am sure that you must be neck deep in mail, just as I am; but I want to say that I sure did enjoy answering the many inquiries handed to me since my letter and little poem were published in The Tree. I just wish to thank you for the many friends I have added to my list in the last few weeks. You know that I wear the insignia of the grand old Tree and always shall wear it.

I am so light hearted now that I can't even think of having the blues again; The H. T. remedy is a sure thing. About two hundred correspondents asked me to send in another poem, so here it is, if you can find room for it. J. W. CASTLEBERRY.

Box 162, Sylacauga, Ala.

As we rule, we can't find room for poetry, but Brother Castleberry's are so popular with The Gang that we will use this one, which is very amusin'.

H is for "Hello, how is The Gang?" O is for owl, wise old guardian. L is for "Lift a load from the weak," and L again is for luck that we seek. O for "observe the rules of the Tree;" W is for "Write to those who may be, in need of help from such as thee." T—that's a hard one; I wrote it down twice. R is easier; it stands for Rice. E is the end of names that are nice; E is the end of "Louise" and "Rice." The whole of this bunk, as you will see, spells the pleasant name, Hollow Tree.

DEAR MISS RICE: I don't know whether you will be surprised to hear from this part of the country, but I think The Hollow Tree is just wonderful. I am now eighteen. I live in the city but don't like it very much. I have five brothers and two sisters, and I never get lonesome. I wish that I could meet you personally, Miss Rice, and then that we could take some magic carpet and ride around and see hundreds of Gangsters.

Wishing you and all the many members of The Hollow Tree good luck, I am, sincerely yours, STELLA BURTON.

1702 Lee Street, Alexandria, La.

DEAR MISS RICE: I have been intending to drop a letter in The Tree for a long time, but I have lived near the border—the Southern one—so long that I guess I kinda got like the Mexes. I put everything off until "manana."

My family made a trip through from the Gulf coast of Texas last summr by auto. We stopped at a small town on the Fourth of July where there was a barbecue for a celebration. Yum! All brown on the outside and a sort of salt juice a-runnin' out when your pearly teeth meet. Then a nice big pickle and coffee and sandwiches—go 'long, man; quit your pesticatin' me!

A word about myself: I'm married and live on a ranch where we raise fruit and alfalfa; have lived on the desert and love it, but like the California orange groves better. Have always had a hankering to write and have written several stories, but haven't sold 'em yet. I would like to hear from other sisters of The Tree who have the scribbling fever. Anybody wanting info about this part of the country can get it from your fellow member, RETTA S. EWERS.

239 South Harrison Street, Riverside, California.

Readers of "Western Story Magazine" can recognize each other by a very attractive button, enameled in colors, with the words, "Hollow Tree Gang, W. S. M."

The buttons are supplied to readers at cost—twenty-five cents, which includes mailing charges.

For men and boys the button has been made so that it can be worn on the coat lapel. For women and girls the design is exactly the same, only it is on a pin. State which you want.

Remittances for the button should be sent to The Hollow Tree, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

DEAR MISS RICE: I have just returned from a two-year jaunt through South and Central America and am now on detail work here in Chicago, where I am a total stranger. I have an idea that I think would be fine, and that would be to have a Hollow Tree Hiking Club in every large city; I would like to organize one here in Chi. I would like to hear from any of the Gangsters anywhere about this. WILLIAM GUNTZ.

450 North Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois.

DEAR MISS RICE: I received The Hollow Tree pin this noon and am very much pleased with it. Thank you very much. I am al-

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ready corresponding with a few of the members and do enjoy it. I want to hear from others and will answer promptly. Very sincerely yours, MRS. MABEL M. TOWNSEND.

Box 796, Mechanicsville, New York.

DEAR MISS RICE: I am a real Western boy, being born and raised in Montana, and after traveling over nearly all of this country I still think that there is none like it. We always had a rodeo every year, but there it was called a stampede, and the best riders and ropers came to enjoy themselves and to show what they could do. I am only twenty-one, so I think that I shall get back home before very long. I am in Florida just now, but in a year or two I'll be turning my face north. I spent nearly all of my boyhood days on the Flathead Indian Reservation, and I know their ways, cutoms, and language, and would be glad to write of them to anybody who is interested.

I began horseback riding when I was seven years old, and it wasn't long afterward before I began to try my first bronk. Best regards to The Hollow Tree Gang!

ROBERT HOLLAND.

Care of Captain Dale, Arch Creek, Fla.

DEAR MISS RICE: May I drop this little note into The Hollow Tree? Yes I, like a great many others, read The Tree before I do the stories. There seems to be such a note of sincerity in all the letters, and I think the brave way that many of those who have trouble and sorrow accept their lives is wonderful and an example to the rest of us. I am twenty-four years old, and even at that I have seen a lot of the trouble that is so thick in this queer old world. Also, have seen quite a little adventure. I would give a great deal if I could see life in the wonderfully brave way that some of the folks who write The Tree seem to.

I wish to thank you for making it possible for us to have this wonderfully friendly meeting place. I assure you that it is a great relief to unburden one's mind, and that we who have so few friends really have a hard time.

With best wishes for The Gang and the wise old owl, I am, yours sincerely,

B. P. STATEN.

Charlotte, N. Carolina.

And here's a Gangster who needs some very special friendship from The Tree brothers, the reason for which you will understand as we read out this letter.

DEAR MISS RICE: I have been reading the W. S. M. and, of course, The Hollow Tree. The folks who write the letters in it seem so very human that I am writing for something I would never ask for face to face. I lost my mother a while ago, and she was the only person that ever meant anything to me. At times I feel so very sad and lonely that I don't know what to do; but I don't make friends very easily, as people always think that I am cold and unfriendly, but I am not at all; only, I find it hard to get acquainted with people. I want some real pals, not just boys who think that they want to go West. C. B.

San Antonio.

DEAR MISS RICE: Will you please make room for another letter? I am a married woman with two little girls, and with a very good husband. I used to live in the country, and now I live in the city, and I cannot seem to get used to it. There doesn't seem much chance of us going back where my heart is always turning, so I am looking to The Tree for comfort. Please, Gangsters who live in the country, will you write a country girl? (MRS.) C. S. POWELL.

28 Laidley Street, San Francisco, Cal.

Got time for just one more letter. Let's stick a hand down in the holla and take the first one that comes up.

DEAR MISS RICE: I see that you have helped different persons to find one another. I wonder if you will help me to find some woman near Los Angeles who would let me live with her and help her in every way, be a friend and companion to her, for a home and such arrangements as we could make. I have a son who can get work in that city, and the doctor tells me that I shall have chronic bronchitis if I stay in this climate, which is very damp. I don't claim to be a domestic expert, but I know about cooking and mending and sewing, and so on, as the majority of women do. I feel that I could make myself well worth while to a refined woman, and perhaps I could find a friend, as she could in me. Of course, there is a great deal more that I could say, but I am sure that you do not want to hear the details of my life, and I know that you would not want to print them. I would sign my name, but there are reasons why I would rather that you should keep it and forward any mail if I am fortunate enough to get any. I believe that this is one of those unusual cases that you, Miss Rice, say the owl will let us write about. Very sincerely yours,

OUT WEST.

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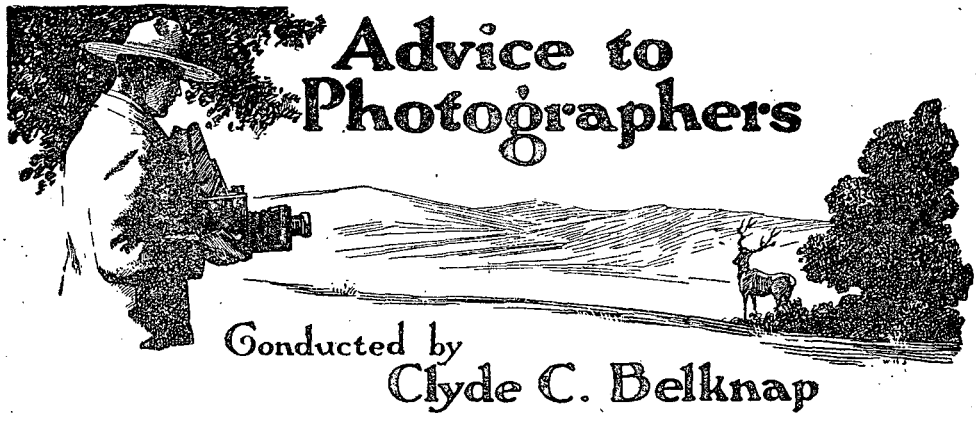

Mr. Belknap will be glad to criticize any photographs sent him, if accompanied by a stamped, addressed envelope of a proper size for return mailing. Questions of general interest will be answered in this department.

WHERE BEAUTY LIES

THE photographer who intends to be successful in taking out-of-door pictures must be able to disassociate the ideas of form and color. This may seem to be a simple statement, but it is really complicated, as I shall proceed to show, by asking a few questions of my readers.

Can you look at an old house, with gray, weatherbeaten sides and roof, with a tangle of weeds in the garden, and a half dead old apple tree on the south side, and see that that will be a charming picture? Can you, on the other hand, look at some trim suburban villa, all bright with green awnings, the straight border of flowers leading to the deep porch alive with color, the pretty, fresh curtains swinging at the windows, and realize that the house is merely a square box and that in the whole composition there is not a graceful or harmonious line? Yet, of these two scenes, it is the bright, cheery, well-kept house, with all its appeal of good housewifery, that will catch your eye unless you are enough of an artist to do what I have mentioned—and that is, to disassociate form and color.

The reason that many a woman who has the reputation of being pretty or beautiful seems to take such a "poor" picture, is that her beauty lies in the color of her adornment, perhaps; the camera will not record that, and therefore she is not beautiful for photography.

The scene which is bright with color is so often misleading to the eye. A line of trees, a bit of the woods, prairie land bright with spring flowers—all seem to the eye what they will not to the camera.

One of the best ways in which you can educate your eyes to find where beauty really lies is to do as I recommended last year—cut out of cardboard some small frames, oval and square and oblong, about the size of the pictures that you want to take, and look through them at the subject which you intend to use. When you have done that, shut your eyes and try mentally to draw that scene in black and white. After you have tried this for a time, you will find that you will be able to perform this gymnastic feat of the mind without any trouble, and you will then know a good picture when you see it.

A woman photographer who is fa-

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mous all over the world for her pictures of cities has, to a large extent, this sense of the beauty of line. Her pictures of the Flatiron Building swimming toward you out of a heavy fog, of a wet day on Madison Square, with the reflections of a few hurrying pedestrians shadowed on the glistening pavements, are sold all over the country, because they have caught something that even the average professional photographer has not—this woman has sensed where beauty of line lay, and to that she has added beauty of atmosphere, both combined being the foundation of all wonderful pictures, whether they are photographed or painted.

The photographer should remember that, while efficiency and trimness and cleanliness and many other desirable qualities are much needed in this world, it is not that that we look for in pictures. There we wish to have our sentiments touched. Main Street, with the new Light and Power Building, may be a fine thing, and the business men of the town will like to have it; but from the artistic standpoint it is unfortunately true that the Light and Power Building is more than likely to be an eyesore.

If you are taking pictures of business buildings and business streets, by all means have those pictures clear and sharp and technically perfect. Be sure that they bring out all details. The man who has a building of this nature would like a photograph to show that it has ten stories, and that there is, say, terra-cotta ornamentation right up to the roof.

In taking the business picture, you should look wholly to the technical end of your work. If the representation is accurate and the production good, you have done your part. But this is not true with the artistic picture, which often consists of some subject which would not appeal to any one until you discover it for them. Thus, I once took a picture of the eyesore of a small town, a ruined old mill, with a bent old willow beside it, all the windows out, and the roof sagging. It was at a crossroads, and there was an ancient wellsweep before it, round which cattle had kept the grass shorn. When I was seen to be photographing this place, every passer-by smiled, but they gathered in small crowds to look at the five-by-seven enlargement of that picture and were highly respectful when a well-known magazine paid me a good price for the negative. To be used as a cover for one of its issues.

Remember that, when it comes to taking a picture, you cannot show that the house has just been painted or that the grass is thick and soft or that the windows are clean. You should get off from your subject and look at the thing as it is without color.

Winding country roads, which look so alluring with their borders of autumnal coloring, are often sad failures, looked at by the camera's eye. The photographer should see that there are some outstanding features, and that it is not merely a mass of smudgy color that he takes. One large tree, sharp against the skyline, will do a great deal to "point up" such a simple picture of a road. So will figures used judiciously.

It would take too long to go into the question of why old houses and old vehicles and "old-fashioned" things look better in a photograph than anything too modern, or as to why the simple lines of the old Dutch or Georgian roof are so fine; but we can at least settle in our minds that this is so, and that we of this age of machinery and rigid lines must always turn to the older and simpler things for beauty, unless we go to the other extreme, which is the stupendous—such as the gigantic and all but unbelievable outline of New York City as it is approached from the New Jersey side.

Perhaps it is because character is not easily made, and that everything must have time to mellow before it is beau-

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tiful; it is also true that the hand of man can make beauty that none of his machines can. We can see this, we photographers, as few can, when we see the fine, delicately individual lines of a deserted old house in the finder, remembering how harsh and sharp are the usual lines of this machinery-made age.

In hunting beauty, there is no lowest thing unworthy of your attention. A subject for the camera which I have seldom seen used is the weeds of the roadside, but in this, as in all things, we must hunt for the line of beauty. To find it for this subject, sit down on a stump or stone and look carefully across the road, on a level with, or a little lower than, your line of vision. There you will see "bits" well worthy of a minute study of the camera. A tall, sturdy fern growing at the root of a sumach, the wild carrot beside it, in blossom, and the spears of the burdock—you will often find splendid compositions in this subject, but in this, as in all, there must be the constant focusing of the eye on the line and not on the color.

In interiors there is a great opportunity, and this is a field that is greatly neglected. Those who do this sort of thing very well, can find a ready market to sell their subjects to magazines. A careful study of a few issues of these mediums will show the person interested in interiors that in this subject there is indeed a vast difference between the pretty and colorful picture and the really fine picture, with its few but good "lines."

It is a mistake to make pictures which tell too obvious a story. Every turn in a little river does not need an occupied canoe on it; some one posing on the old stile will often take away the charm of that bit; any one at all, looking straight into the camera with a conceited smile or throwing themselves consciously into the picture, is just that surely throwing themselves out and spoiling the picture. Only those who have great natural grace, which has had some training, ever succeed in looking anything but foolish when posing in what would be a good picture without them.

Remember that water will not have the color in the picture that you see in it; that flowers are usually very washed-out looking unless they are taken at close quarters, when, of course, they are merely pictures of flowers and not pictures in the wider sense; and that too thick and too brilliant foliage will look messy. Approach all subjects for your camera with an eye that is as nearly like it as you can, and you will find that you will be able to discern true beauty in many places where it is not manifested to the casual observer.

NEW RIVER DISCOVERED IN THE SISKIYOUS

THE discovery of a 160-acre valley high up in the Salmon River mountain range in Siskiyou County, Washington, was reported recently by G. O. Laws, deputy fish and game warden of Trinity County. It is believed that this valley has never before been penetrated by man. The valley is surrounded by jagged, granite peaks, and its elevation is estimated as 9,000 feet above the sea. Deputy Laws said that he had scaled one of the peaks and looked down upon the valley with spy glasses. He reported having sighted a river which, after flowing through the valley, plunges over a precipice 800 feet high and then empties into a branch of the Salmon River. Forest rangers who patrol in the vicinity are now trying to find an entrance to the valley.

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MISSING

This department, conducted in duplicate in WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE and DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

ROWE, ARTHUR W. T. and **JOHN M.**, the sons of Mary A. Kelly and Richard Rowe. When last heard of they were living in England, and John M. was then staying with a Mr. Edgar Rogers. Their sister Lillian, who lost all trace of them some years ago, is now living in Minnesota and is anxious to learn something definite regarding her brothers. She will be very grateful to any one who can give her news of them, or who will call their attention to this notice. Mrs. Lillian Rowe H., care of this magazine.

McNALLY, WILLIAM.—He was born in England and lived in northeastern Pennsylvania until about twenty-five years ago, when he went to Utah. He traveled extensively in the Western States, and was last heard of in Salt Lake City about 1913. His niece would be glad to hear from him or from any one who can give her news of him. N. C., care of this magazine.

BESTER, DEWEY THOMAS.—He was last heard of in Sioux City, Iowa, and it is thought that he may still be in or near that place. He is about five feet seven inches tall, twenty-four years of age, with brown eyes and black hair, and was working as a cook in a hotel in Sioux City, in 1919. Any information as to his present address will be most gratefully received by his mother, Mrs. Alice M. Jordan, 317 MacDonald Avenue, Richmond, California.

McCOY, ORA ELIZABETH.—In July, 1921, she was placed in the children's home in Birmingham, Alabama, and was adopted out in August of the same year to a doctor somewhere near by. She is now two and a half years old, with brown eyes and dark blond hair. There was a brown spot on the back of her head. Any one who knows of her whereabouts will do a great favor by writing to her mother, who will gratefully appreciate any information. Mrs. Ethel Acra, 813 Thirteenth Street, Ensley, Alabama.

CARLYLE, HOMER.—Come home. Everything is all right. Your mother, Dora Carlyle, Lorena, Texas.

McDERMOTT, THOMAS B., sergeant in the U. S. Marine Corps, known as "Nebraska Slim" in the West. He is six feet one inch and three-quarters tall, has red hair, and was last heard from in Omaha, where he was doing recruiting duty. He is asked to write to his old pal George, in care of this magazine.

BUCHBINDER, LUCY M. (DOROTHY).—She is asked to write to her old friend from the "Imperator," who would very much like to hear from her. Jack W., care of this magazine.

WHEATLEY, HARRY.—He is twenty years of age, five feet ten inches tall, with light-brown hair and eyes, and was last heard from in San Francisco in September, 1920. Any information as to his whereabouts will be greatly appreciated by his brother, A. Wheatley, care of this magazine.

MELTON, WILLIAM H.—He was born in 1858, had blue eyes, light hair, and fair complexion, and was last heard of in British Columbia. His brother James was killed in Indiana in 1884, and his daughter would be very happy if she could find her father's only brother. Mrs. Mary Fleming, care of this magazine.

YOUNG, DOROTHY LA RUE.—Please write at once to Robert Widman, Van Ness Hotel, 128 Main Street, Los Angeles. He knows where I am and will send you my address. I have a fine job, but am lonesome for you. Please be with me for Christmas. Stanley is in a Catholic school. Write above address at once. Waiting to hear from you, your daddy, W. W. Young.

SCHAFFER.—I was placed in a home for children somewhere in Boston, Massachusetts, when I was three or four years old. I was born March 15, 1900. From Boston I was sent to the Children's Home in Des Moines, Iowa, and in a few days was adopted by Mr. and Mrs. H. Weiss, of Plainfield, Iowa. Later I went to Texas with my foster parents and married there. As well as I can remember, my father was working in a mine when something fell on him, killing the mules he was working and injuring him so badly that he died in a few days. I don't know if I had any sisters or brothers or other relatives. My name was Mary Beatrice Schaffer, or Schafer, but I was known as Ruth Weiss after my adoption. If any one can help me to find my mother, or any of my relatives, I shall be deeply grateful. Mrs. O. E. Brower, care of this magazine.

NORA and **BENA.**—Please write to the same address. Bob.

KIPPEN, ROBERT K.—Any one who knows his present address will do a great favor by writing to Miss Clara Hardin, care of this magazine.

PRESSLER, MARY.—She was born September 7, 1863, and lived in Indianapolis, Indiana, where she was last heard from over thirty-five years ago. Her mother's name was Susan Pressler. Her cousin is very anxious to find her and will greatly appreciate any information that will help to learn where she is. W. S. Shaw, Box 292, Centerville, Iowa.

KINGSBERRY, MRS. CATHERINE.—She is asked to write to her pal Bobbie, who will be glad to hear from any one who knows her address. Mrs. Geneva Halstead, 142 East Truslow Avenue, Fullerton, California.

LEHR, MRS., formerly Lizzie M. Davie, and her sister, **MRS. ANNIE VAUGHN**, who used to live in Harrison, Pennsylvania. There are two brothers, John and Sydney Davis. Any information that will help to find these friends will be most gratefully appreciated by John L. McDowell, 216 Weston Road South, West Toronto, Canada.

INGRAM, EMILY and **WILLIAM**, and **GEORGE SMALL.** Any one who knows the address of any one of these persons will do a great favor by writing to R. F. D. Box 409, West Albany, New York.

ATTENTION.—Former members of "Fire Eating" Headquarters Department, Third M. G. Battalion, First Division, A. E. F., and A. E. G. Keldson, of Wyoming; "Windy," of Connecticut, and Boldry, of Florida, write to your old buddy, "The Animal." Corporal P. Montejunas, Company G, Thirty-fifth Infantry, Schofield Barracks, H. T.

ROBINSON, JAMES.—He is about five feet eight inches tall, with very black hair, dark-brown eyes, and is about twenty-eight years old. He was last heard of in La Crosse, Wisconsin, in 1912, where he finished normal school. Any news of him will be greatly appreciated by his old pal of 1912, Cyril N. Powers, 803 Seventh Avenue West, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

BEEMAN, EDSON HOWARD.—He entered the army in Texas, was transferred to Fort St. Michael, Alaska, and was discharged from there in July, 1921. His mother has not heard from him since, except for a souvenir folder which she received from San Francisco in April, 1922, and which bore no address. She is very much worried about him, and would be grateful for any information that would help her to know where he is. She wants him to come home. Mrs. Anna Beeman, 53 Park Street, Meriden, Connecticut.

WOLF, CHARLES and **LAWRENCE.**—Charles left his home in Fairbury, Nebraska, when he was seventeen years old, and Lawrence was put in the Nebraska Children's Home in 1903. They are asked to write to their youngest sister, Lena, in care of this magazine.

CASHEN, JAMES.—He was last heard of in the oil fields twenty years ago. He is the son of Richard and Norah Cashen, and formerly lived in Peoria, Illinois. He is asked to write to his brother at 508 North Logan Street, Lincoln, Illinois.

ALLA MAY.—Please write to me in care of this magazine. I am back East and would be glad to hear from you. F. Norton.

CROKER, FRANK E.—He was last heard from in Sunset or Wallace, Idaho, and all letters sent to him have been returned. He has not written since 1916. He is asked to write home at once. Any information that will help to know where he is will be gratefully appreciated. Mrs. E. R. Croker, McAllen, Texas.

G. H. W.—Mother died in Bridlington, England, and it is important that we have your address. Write to J. E. W., care of this magazine.

HARRISON, H. M.—I am very ill and am unable to support the children any longer. Please write as soon as possible. Mother, 2121 St. James Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio.

DAVIS, ETHEL.—She is forty years of age and was last heard of in Cincinnati, Ohio. She is asked to send her address to Louis William Franke, care of this magazine.

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JACOBS.—Agnes or Molly Jacobs, the only child of Ester and Abraham Jacobs, born June 7, 1885, at 117 Ridge Street, New York City, was taken from her people and home on August 26, 1889, and is anxious to know why this was done. She would also like to know what her mother's name was before her marriage. Any helpful information will be gratefully appreciated. Mrs. E. O. H., care of this magazine.

CARNAHAN, JOHN HANNUM.—He is sixteen years old, about five feet nine inches tall, with dark-blue eyes and dark-brown hair. He left his home near Yampa, Colorado, in the spring of 1921. His brother followed and found him working with a road gang near Red Dirt. He wanted to stay and work, so his brother left him there, after making him promise to write home often. His people have not heard a word from him since. Any one who knows his whereabouts will do a great favor by letting his family know, or by asking him to write to his sister, Miss Mildred Carnahan, 407 North Green Street, Wichita, Kansas.

HASENBEIN, MAX E., who conducted a music-publishing business in Racine, Wisconsin, a year or more ago. Any information as to his present address will be greatly appreciated. Richard B. Markle, Haines, Oregon.

DARROW, JOHN H., and his wife, formerly of Denver and Walden, North Park, Colorado. Also **MRS. C. R. MURREY**, formerly of Wichita, Kansas. Any information regarding the whereabouts of these persons will be greatly appreciated by a friend. C. E. W., care of this magazine.

LYONS, WILLIAM E.—He left Alexandria about January 12, 1922, and was last heard from in Jaeger, Oklahoma. Any one who knows of him, or who can give a clew as to his whereabouts will do a great favor by notifying his old pal, Elmer G. Rudisill, Route 2, Box 90, Alexandria, South Dakota.

MARSHALL.—I was born in Fort Monroe, Virginia, in 1903. My father was a sergeant in the Fourth Artillery Band. His name was William Marshall. He died when I was nine months old and I was put in an orphan home, being afterward adopted by Charles Jansale, of Roanoke. I heard that my father had a sister and brother in New York. I am all alone in the world and would be very glad if I could hear from my uncle or from my Aunt Eva. Edgar Allen Marshall, care of this magazine.

WILDER, MAE EDNA.—She was a beauty specialist and had offices in the Dearborn Building at Chicago, about twelve years ago. Her cousin would like very much to hear from her. There is important news for her and any information as to her present address will be greatly appreciated. Mrs. Mary Buck, Box 33, Alliance, Nebraska.

GUEST, LUNA A.—He was a member of Companies I and H, Twenty-third Infantry, in the Philippines in 1898-1900, and was last heard of in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1911. His old comrade and pal would be glad to hear from him, or from any one who knows his present address. E. Norman, 80 South Main Street, Seymour, Connecticut.

SEIFERT, WILLIAM.—He is about fifty-five years old, a bookbinder by trade, and over thirty yeas ago he lived on Third Street, between Avenues B and C, New York City. Any information as to his present whereabouts will be greatly appreciated by B. H., care of this magazine.

BROTT, CLAUDE M., is asked to write to his old pal at Charlotte, North Carolina.—L. M. S.

DUDLEY, MARY E., who, during the fall of 1917, lived in Burlington, Vermont, and later moved to Jersey City, where she lived at 2885 Hudson Boulevard, during August, 1919. Her home is believed to be at Saranac Lake, New York. Any one who knows her present address will do a favor by writing to J. D. Wilson, 715 Boggs Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

SMITH, GEORGE D.—He married Minnie Hays and lived at Twenty-fourth and Magazine Streets, Louisville, Kentucky. He left home about 1898. Any information about him will be greatly appreciated by his son, George Smith, 81 Henry Street, Brooklyn, New York.

WHELAN, JAMES.—He was last heard of in Houston, Texas, about seventeen years ago, where he was employed on the railroad as switchman, or gateman at a crossing. A relative will greatly appreciate any information as to his present whereabouts. Mr. P. Heavey, 119 Burgher Avenue, Dongan Hills, Staten Island, New York.

BOWERS, RAYMOND EDWARD.—Please write to me at once at 5711 Race Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.—Dorothy.

HILL, THOMAS B.—Thirty years ago he was living in Rehoboth, Massachusetts. His sister would be glad to hear from him, and will greatly appreciate any information that will help her to communicate with him. She hopes he will see this and write to her without delay. Mrs. E. A. Doyle, Jobstown, New Jersey.

G. T. G.—Let me hear from you. Things are not going well here. I will join you. Mac, care of Fountain of Youth, St. Augustine, Florida.

DAGENAIS, BLANCHE.—When last heard from she was in Detroit, Michigan, in 1920. Any information as to her present whereabouts will be gladly received by a friend, G. I. A., care of this magazine.

J. J. P.—Let me hear from you soon, as I have to do something about the children.—Carrie.

SOMERTON, MISS LILLIAN M.—Please write to an old friend at once, who has good reasons for wishing to communicate with you. E. F. Terry, Route 5, Box 160, Jacksonville, Florida.

DUTTON, ERNEST.—He is about fifty-three years old and was last heard of nineteen years ago in Melbourne, Australia, when he was undecided whether to go to Auckland, New Zealand, or to San Francisco. His mother and relatives will be most grateful to any one who can give them news of him. Owen Jones, care of this magazine.

WARD, CHARLES EDGAR.—He was born in Maine about fifty years ago and his last known address was at Milo, that State, about five or six years ago. He is of medium height with dark hair and blue eyes. He had one sister, Mrs. Frank Dodge, who used to live at West Pembroke, Maine, but is not there now. Any one who can give news of this man, whether living or dead, will do a very great favor by writing to A. E. M., care of this magazine.

MARSH, FRANKLIN.—He was last heard of in the summer of 1879 in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. He was a railroad worker, a blacksmith and machinist, was rather short of stature, heavy set, and left his home suddenly. He has not been heard from for over forty-three years. He would now be eighty-five years old. Any information concerning him, living or dead, will be gratefully received by his brother, Parker E. Marsh, 8 One Hundred and Seventeenth Street, Troy, New York.

HENDERSON, WILLIAM.—His pard, who trapped with him last winter north of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, would like to hear from him, as he has lost all trace of him since breaking up camp in the spring. Any one who knows where he is, please write to William (Red) McIntosh, care of this magazine.

STONE, EDWARD, the son of James and Elizabeth Adelaide Buffington Stone. He was last heard of in Memphis, Tennessee, March 18, 1907. He was five feet five inches in height, weighed about two hundred pounds, with blue eyes, light complexion, and black hair. Also his sister, **CAROLINE JOSEPHINE STONE**, who was born July 31, 1882, and was last heard of twenty years ago somewhere in Ohio. She was then five feet four inches in height, weighed about ninety-eight pounds, and had golden hair and hazel eyes. Their stepmother's name was Polly Sprouse. Their father, who is eighty-two years old, is longing to see his children again, and will be most grateful for any information that will help to find them. He hopes they, or some one belonging to them, will see this and write to him. Mr. James Stone, 744 West Third Street, Logan, Ohio.

REEVES, MRS., formerly of Buffalo, New York, and last heard of in Pineland, Texas, about seven years ago. Any information as to her present whereabouts will be appreciated by an old friend. Friend, care of this magazine.

DE CORTE, PRUDENT, or may be known as John Corte. He was last heard of in Dallas, Texas, about 1917. He is a Belgian, and speaks English with an accent. Any information about him will be greatly appreciated by J. A. De Corte, 612 South Quincy Avenue, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

ATTENTION.—At the outset of the Civil War I enlisted, in August, 1861, for three years, with Company C, Thirty-third Illinois Volunteers Infantry, at Peoria, Illinois, and later was transferred to Company A of the Eighth Infantry. I would like to hear from any of my comrades who were with me during the war. Thomas B. Parker, Box 394, Tecumseh, Nebraska.

PHIP.—Mother and dad do not blame you for your course. They just want to know where to write you an encouraging letter. Mother is quite ill because you have not written to her, and cannot understand it. Please write.—Sis.

HERMAN, FRANK, who was tending bar in Three Forks, Montana, when the armistice was signed, is asked to write to M. G., care of this magazine.

COAN, ERNEST G.—He is thirty-nine years old but looks much younger, is about five feet nine inches tall, with light hair and blue eyes, and is a practical newspaper man. It is believed that he is in California. His mother is deeply grieved at his disappearance, and any information that will help to get in touch with him will be most gratefully received by his mother and friends. Please write to Mrs. S. E. Pennington, Pozo, California.

EMERSON, JACK.—Please let me hear from you, or come. I need you badly.—Leah.

SIMCOX, or **STEINMETZ, MARION.**—Please write to me in care of this magazine. I am very anxious to hear from you. If any one who knows her will call her attention to this notice the favor will be very much appreciated. Helen A. Steinmetz.

THOMPSON, ALBERT.—Please write and let me know where you are. Am worried and lonesome.—Nellie T.

WHITE, EVELYN, sometimes known as Fanny Crosby, was last heard of in Seattle in 1920. She is asked to write to R. F. Jones, care of this magazine.

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MARTIN, ROY.—He lived in Drumright, Oklahoma, and it is believed that his home is in Missouri. An old friend is anxious to hear from him and will be grateful for any helpful information. H. J. N., care of this magazine.

GILBERT, MAMIE S.—She was last heard of in Oregon County, Missouri, in March, 1904. Any one who knows her present address will do a favor by communicating with *E. M. L., care of this magazine.*

REED, WILLIAM ARTHUR.—He was born August 6, 1897. He is five feet eleven inches tall, with black hair and blue eyes. All is forgiven and he is asked to return to his baby and wife, who will be glad to have him back home, and will appreciate any helpful information. Mrs. Ruth Reed, 706 Johnson Street, Amarillo, Texas.

J. C. B.—Mother wrote me that I could get in touch with you through this magazine. Send letter to me, Boyce, San Francisco. I am alone.

SHIPP, LUCILLE.—She attended school in Huntington, Indiana, in 1900-1901, and was last heard of in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1903. She is about five feet four inches in height, with brown hair, and wore glasses. Any information as to her present whereabouts will be appreciated by C. R. Wilson, Eighteenth Street Substation, Logansport, Indiana.

YOUNG, JOHN PHILIP, or his wife, **RITA,** are asked to write at once, as there is important news for them. Abner E. Enbonk, care of this magazine.

ERICHSEN, CARL ZACHRIES.—He was last heard from in Philadelphia in 1915. He is about five feet ten inches tall, fifty-seven years old, has light-brown hair, and is a carpenter. His wife will be grateful for any news of him, dead or alive. Mrs. Marie Erichsen, care of this magazine.

KALL, ARTHUR C.—He is asked to write to his friend and is assured that there is nothing to fear. He is welcome to return. Ruby B. Maris, 1237 Hinckley Street, Detroit, Michigan.

SMITH, KENNETH MOSHIER.—Please communicate with your mother and Brother Preston. Very important. Mae L. Moshier Smith.

HARGRAVE, CLAY.—He was last heard from just before the war, in Jefferson City, Missouri. Also **FRANK HARGRAVE,** last heard from in Memphis, Tennessee, or their sister, **CLARA.** Their friends are very anxious to hear from them and hope they will write soon. Mrs. F. E. Rauser, Box 261, Houston Heights, Houston, Texas.

LIKANER.—I was sent to the orphan home in New York when I was a baby, and was sent from there to Vienna, Missouri. I have never heard of any of my relatives, and have been told that my parents are supposed to have died when I was a baby. I would like to hear from any one of my name, and would be glad to know if I have any relatives living. I was three and a half years old when I left New York. William Likaner, care of this magazine.

WATSON, GEORGE N.—He was last heard from two years ago when he was in Akron, Ohio, working for a rubber company. He spoke of going to Texas to work in the oil fields. He is about five feet ten inches tall, with blue eyes and black hair. There is important news for him and he is asked to write to Mrs. M. Clark, 301 Third Street, Pocahontas, Petersburg, Virginia.

SMITH, ROBERT J.—He has been missing for seven years, and soon after he left home he sent a post card, in August, 1915, from Kansas City, and has not been heard from since. He is now twenty-six years old. His mother is very much worried about him and wants him to know that if he will come home he will be gladly welcomed. He is rather tall, of light complexion, with freckles and rather large teeth. Any information about him will be gratefully received by his mother, Mrs. F. Smith, 1621 North Newkirk Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

CLAY, BURRIO, is asked to write to V. G., care of this magazine, who is very anxious to hear from him.

DORN, CHARLES.—He was last seen in Omaha, Nebraska, in July last. He is about five feet eight inches tall, with black hair and blue eyes. His mother is very much worried at his neglecting to write to her, and a friend would be glad to hear from him, or from any one who knows where he is. When last heard from he was going to Canada for the harvest. Information that will help to communicate with him will be very much appreciated by P. Colwell, care of this magazine.

BECK, LAURA C.—Dear mother, please forgive and write to me. I am worried more than you think. Please write in care of this magazine.—Clarence.

LORETTA W.—Please send me your address so that I can come to you. Use the same address.—L. M.

WOLFE, EARL, who is nineteen years old and whose home is somewhere in Iowa, is asked to write to a friend *who has important news for him. R. H. MacDonald, care* of this magazine.

CHAFFEEITES.—An old classmate would like to hear from **ED. T. PRESTON,** formerly in Brooklyn, New York; **CARL WINEMILLER,** of Pennsylvania; **JOHN VANCE,** of Portland, Maine, or any others. Mrs. Edith Hay Lockwood, 115 West Third Street, Oswego, New York.

PIKE, or **KING, MAY.**—Please come home to mother. We want you back.

FREY, CARL I.—He is about forty-six years old, five feet seven inches tall, with dark-brown hair and eyes and fair complexion. He was last heard of in Seattle six or seven years ago, when he said he was leaving for Alaska. Any one who can give information about him *will do a great favor by writing to his sister-in-law,* Mrs. Carolyn Van Driel, 2154 Hodgdon Street, Dubuque, Iowa, or to his son, Carl A. Frey, at the same address.

ERNEST.—Please advise me of your present whereabouts. Important. Mrs. M. Holley, Metropole Hotel, Columbus, Ohio.

CROWLEY, JAMES.—He is about fifty-nine years old, six feet tall, of dark complexion, with black hair and dark-blue eyes. He and his brother-in-law, William Harkins, were last heard from at Boise and Lewiston, Idaho. His daughter, who has not heard from her father in nineteen years, will be grateful for any information about him, and hopes he will see this and write to her. Mrs. C. W. Home, 267 Clay Street, Arkadelphia, Arkansas.

DELANEY, E. L., who was last heard from in Philadelphia, is asked to write to his wife in Elyria, at the old address. Charlotte.

BELMONT, J. P.—He left his home at Chandler on October 2nd last. He is forty years old, six feet two inches tall, weighs about one hundred and seventy pounds, has black hair, turning gray, and brown eyes. His wife would be glad to hear from him and would gratefully appreciate any information that would help to find him. Mrs. Florence Belmont, Route 4, Chandler, Oklahoma.

YUKAS.—About sixteen years ago a family of this name lived on the East Side of Joliet, Illinois. There were six children. The mother died young and the father died a year or so later. The children were scattered, a boy and two girls being put in an orphanage. The others were lost track of. The eldest girl has been found. The one next to her, named Rose, is said to be married, and was living in Louisiana, but later moved to New York. A sister about seventeen years old is believed to be with her. Any information that would lead to correspondence with her would be gladly received by her sister, who has not seen her since their mother died. Please write to Miss Ethel Kelty, R. F. D. Route 2, Joliet, Illinois.

STEWART, JAMES E.—When last heard of he was near Traverse City, Michigan, working in lumber camps, an occupation which he has followed for years. In the camps he was known as "Jimmie." Any information as to his present whereabouts will be greatly appreciated by his brother, J. W. Stewart, Berkshire Road, Gates Mill, Ohio.

WALTON, ERNEST.—Please write to an old pal who would very much like to hear from you. Fred Lynn, Lock Box 661, Eldorado, Illinois.

LYNCH, GEORGE HENRY.—He served in the U. S. Marine Corps during the war. It is believed that his home is in Gainsboro, Tennessee. Any information regarding him will be gratefully received by his friend, Jim, care of this magazine.

TED.—Please write to Tip. I am back from a three years' stay on the Rhine. Address John Smith, Hulbert, Arkansas, care of J. C. Owens.

BROGA, ARTHUR.—I left him in Perry, Arkansas, in 1920. His home is in New Haven, Connecticut. He is about five feet seven inches tall, and his right foot has been broken. Any one who knows his address will do a great favor by sending it to his old pal, William Vaughn, 222 Putnam Street, Nashville, Tennessee.

STROBEL, MABELLE, who married James Sheynerska, just returned from France, wounded in foot, and last heard from in a logging camp at Cody, Wyoming, in 1920. Maybelle is asked to write home to her mother, who is very anxious about her, and will be grateful for any information that will help her to communicate with her. Mrs. R. Strobel, R. F. D. 2, Saegerstown, Pennsylvania.

HAYES, ROBERT LEE.—His children, Dora and Daisy, would like very much to have news of their father and would be glad to hear from any one related to him, or to their mother, who was Dora Ramsey before her marriage, but who is now dead. Please write to D. L. H., care of this magazine.

FLO.—Who was at one time employed at the West Town Hotel, Chicago, or any one who knows her whereabouts, is asked to write to her cousin, who has news of her parents for her. Dale, care of this magazine.

WILLIAMS, GEORGE and **WALTER.**—They left their home in Colorado about 1895, and are now between thirty and forty years of age. Any information regarding them would be greatly appreciated by their sister, Mrs. W. H. B., care of this magazine.

HESSE, HENRY.—*Please send your address to this* magazine. Your wife is very anxious to communicate with you, and will be glad to hear from you.

CRABLE, RICHARD.—Your father has been very ill, and all are worrying about you. Please write at once to your sisters, Ruth and Ethel, at 209 South Fifth Street, Columbus, Ohio.

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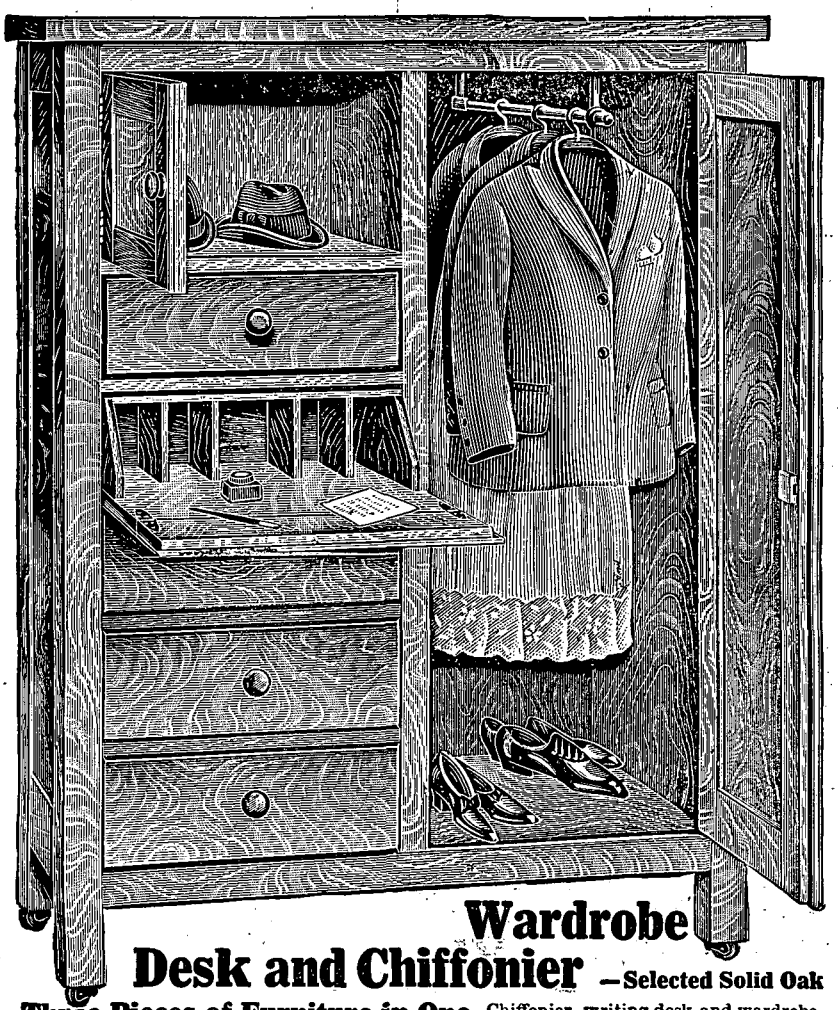

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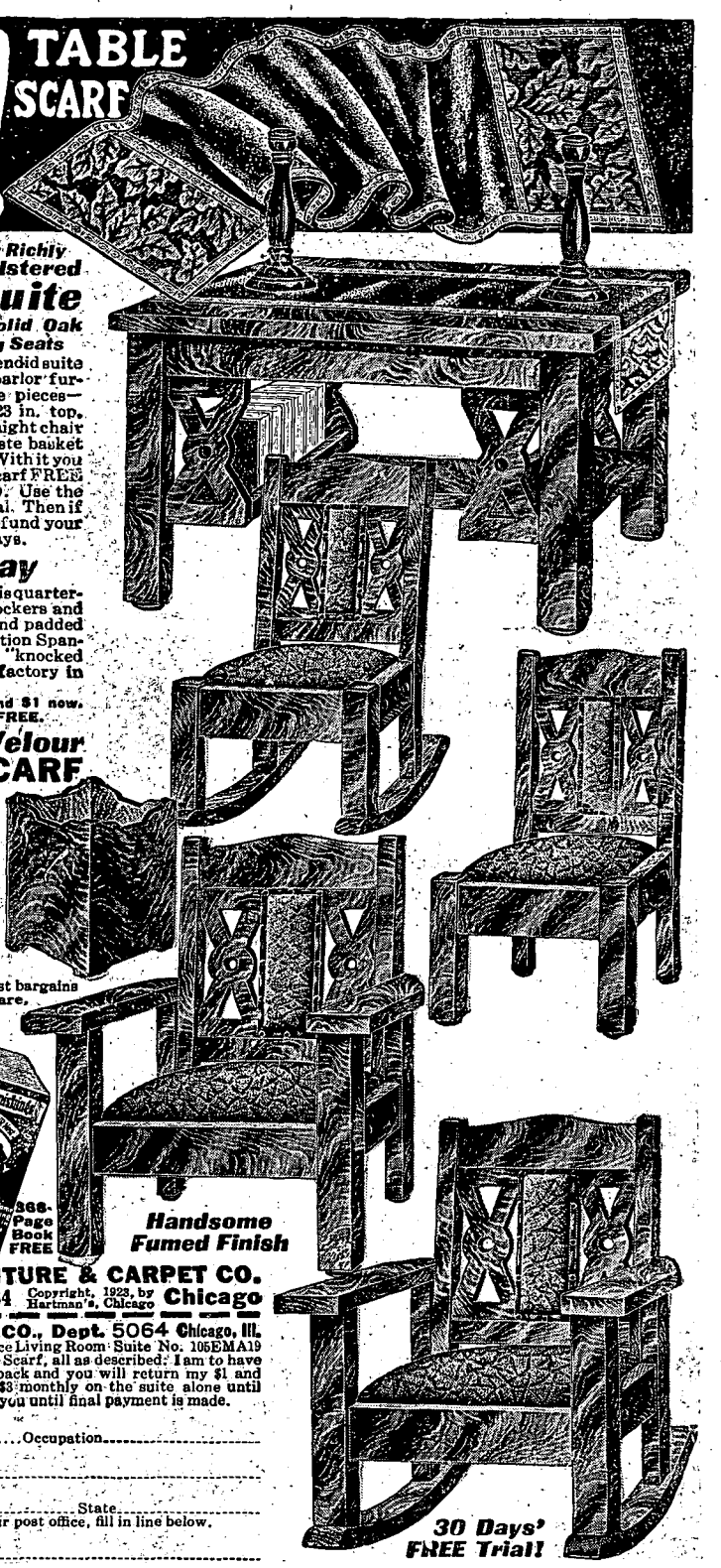

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